THE FOUR GOSPELS *and the* CHRISTIAN LIFE

WALTER B. DENNY

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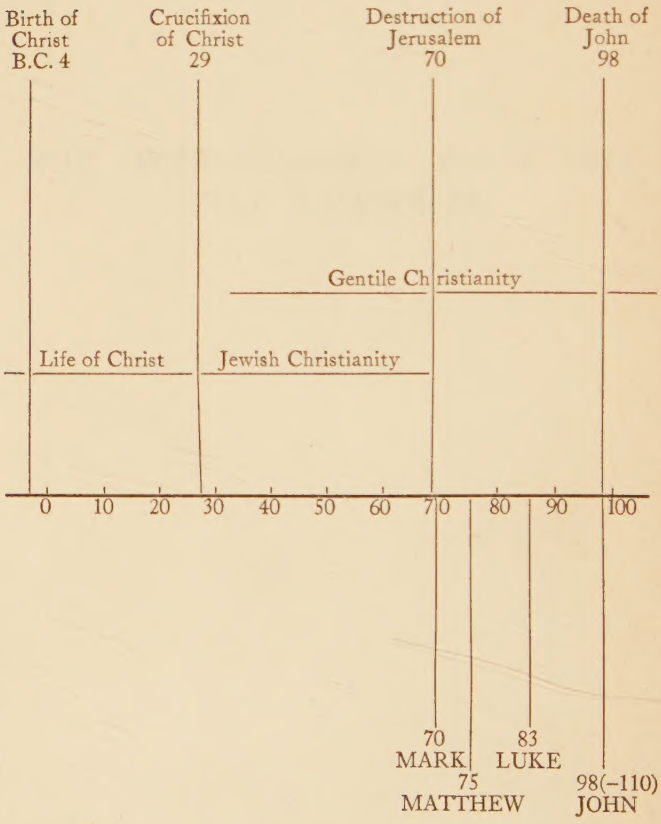
THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CENTURY AND THE PROBABLE DATES OF THE FOUR GOSPELS



The Four Gospels and the Christian Life

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY WIFE,

WHOSE LOVE FOR CHRIST
AND EAGERNESS TO MAKE HIM KNOWN
WERE THE INSPIRATION
OF THIS BOOK

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THE GOSPEL AND THE GOSPELS

CHAPTER I

The Gospel and the Gospels

1. **The first Christian century.** The period covered by the lives of Jesus and his apostles includes almost exactly the first century of our era. If we represent the century by a horizontal line (see chart, frontispiece) divided for convenience into ten-year sections, we shall be able to get a simple, bird's-eye view of the great movements that resulted in the permanent establishment of the Christian religion in the world. Four events with their dates stand out most prominently: (1) the birth of Jesus, B.C. 4[1]; (2) the death of Jesus, A.D. 29; (3) the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70; (4) the death of John, the last of the original apostles, about A.D. 98.

These dates help us to see the three main movements that had to do with the founding of Christianity: (1) the life of Jesus, lasting

[1] The Christian era, or system of dating from the birth of Christ, was originated about the middle of the sixth century by Dionysius Exiguus, abbott of a monastery in Rome. It has been discovered since then that Dionysius was mistaken by several years in his date for the birth of Christ. Since it is now impracticable to change the calendar, the birth of Christ must accordingly be given as B.C. 4.

about a third of a century; (2) the period of Jewish Christianity, when the center of the Christian movement was in Jerusalem; (3) the period of Gentile, or non-Jewish Christianity, when the new religion spread out beyond the borders of Palestine, and took root in the provinces and cities of the Roman empire. It will be noticed that these last two periods overlap considerably, for the change from one to the other was accompanied by much struggle and controversy, and took a long time.

2. **The career of Jesus.** Jesus was about thirty-three years old when the Roman authorities, to please the Jews, nailed him to the cross. Thirty years of his life were passed chiefly in the village of Nazareth, where he grew up and followed the trade of a carpenter. We have so little direct knowledge of these years that they are often called the "hidden years." But all this time he was growing, developing in body and mind, so that when at last he laid aside his tools and entered upon his work of preaching and healing, he was fully prepared.

In three short years he lived in the light of pitiless publicity such a life that for two thousand years no one has been able to detect a flaw in his personal character; his teaching remains the highest standard that

the world has known for individual lives and for civilization itself; and his life as a whole, sealed by his obedience unto death and followed by his triumphant resurrection, has proved to be the greatest incentive in the world for lifting men and society into higher and nobler ways of living.

3. **The Jewish church in Jerusalem.** A few weeks after the death of Jesus his disciples passed through a strange and wonderful experience (Acts 2) which convinced them absolutely that Jesus was living, spiritually and invisibly, in their midst. This experience marks the historical beginning of the Christian Church.

The first disciples were all Jews, and the headquarters of the new movement were in Jerusalem, probably in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark, where Jesus may have celebrated his last Passover meal with his disciples, and where the Pentecostal experience may have taken place. The new church appeared to be little more than a new sect, or denomination, of the Jewish religion, the unique feature being that its members believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and that though he was already spiritually present, he would soon return bodily and visibly, to deliver the Jewish people from their subjection to Rome, and make of them a great

and independent nation. Only Jews were admitted into the membership of this infant church.

The leaders of the church in this earliest period were Simon Peter, and James and John the sons of Zebedee. James was soon put to death by the Roman provincial "king" (Acts 12 : 2), and another James, the brother of Jesus himself, took his place among the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

4. **The Gentile churches of Paul.** Jesus himself did not intend that his followers should be only Jews. He came to bring the knowledge of God to all men. It was with great reluctance and only through hard experiences that the early apostles overcame their race prejudices, and acknowledged that Gentiles, i. e., Greeks and Romans, could also become Christians. Peter learned this lesson (Acts 10), though he sometimes forgot it (Gal. 2 : 11–14), and did not become the leader of the Gentile church in Rome until the very last years of his life.

It is Paul to whom belongs the credit of making the new religion break away from its Jewish limitations, and spread everywhere throughout the Roman world. Without the tireless and heroic labours of this great missionary it is hard to see how Christianity could ever have grown to be anything more

than a sect of Judaism. With the sagacity of a great statesman, Paul carried his gospel message into the provinces of Asia Minor, then into Greece, and at last into Rome itself, where a church had already been organized before his coming. When at last the armies of Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and the Jews ceased to exist as a distinct nation, and the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered along with their Jewish brethren, Paul had already planted the religion of Christ so widely that it did not perish with the Jewish temple, but lived on with its roots firmly embedded in the life of the Gentile Roman world.

After the death of Paul the center of interest in the Christian movement shifts first to Peter, who now moved to Rome and became the leader of the important church there. Later our attention is directed chiefly to Ephesus, an important city in Asia Minor, where the large and strong church became the center of a flourishing missionary movement in the surrounding provinces. Here the apostle John seems to have been the leader, and here the last of our Gospels was written at the end of the first century or in the first years of the second.

5. **When the Gospels were written.** With this brief review of the early years of Chris-

tianity in mind, we may now note the names and the dates of our four Gospels upon our diagram. It should be remembered that there are many complicated problems involved in the correct dating of these writings, so that it must not be inferred that the dates here given command the unanimous assent of all scholars. It is quite certain, however, that Mark was the first, and that it was written about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). Matthew and Luke came next, following Mark within ten or fifteen years. It seems probable that Matthew was written quite soon after the destruction of Jerusalem (about A.D. 75), in view of its evident interest in the problems that grew out of that event; some scholars, however, believe that it was written after Luke (which we may assign to A.D. 83). The fourth — or The Gospel of John — was considerably later, coming at the very end of the century, or in the opening years of the following century (A.D. 98–110).

Two facts of great importance now stand out clearly as we survey our diagram.

(1) The first three Gospels stand fairly close together in point of time, while John's Gospel is so much later that it stands in a class by itself. As we shall see later, the

first three Gospels have certain points of resemblance that make it convenient to study them in a group, while John is so different from the others that it requires special study.

(2) Not one of the Gospels was written for more than forty years after the events which it narrates. This fact is of great importance. During this time a whole new generation was born and grew up. The men who wrote the Gospels had become old men. We are to think of these four memoirs of Jesus as the work of old and mature men writing for the help of younger people. They are not trying merely to give their readers an exact chronicle of all that Jesus said and did, but are selecting those stories out of their knowledge of his life that they had come to feel were the most significant, and that would give these younger Christians, who had never seen Jesus, a strong and true impression of him.

6. **Why the Gospels were not written earlier.** There were at least four reasons why Christians did not earlier feel the need of writing down the stories of the life and teachings of Jesus.

(1) They expected Jesus to return in person very soon. All the records of the early churches show that this belief was very

strong among the first Christians (see, for example, Acts 1 : 11; 3 : 20; 1 Thess. 4 : 13–18). This belief was based chiefly on the fact that the previous career of Jesus had not corresponded to the hopes of the Jewish nation regarding their Messiah; consequently the disciples assumed that he must be coming back again to fulfill literally the ancient promises. A literal and prejudiced interpretation of some of Jesus' own teachings seemed to support this belief. With this hope so strong among them, their chief interest was not in recalling his past life, but in looking forward and getting ready for the greater times that they believed were just ahead.

(2) To these early Christians the matter of supreme importance, while they waited and made ready for their Master's return, was the cultivation of a keen sense of fellowship, by faith and prayer, with the invisible, spiritually present Lord. This sense of the spiritual presence of Christ in their hearts, and in their midst as the bond of their Christian brotherhood, was what made them Christians. It did not seem nearly as important to them to remember all the things that happened during the earthly career of their Master, as it was to cultivate this inward certainty that he was even now close

to them, saving them from their sins, helping them every moment to bear their burdens, and leading them in their efforts to induce others to become Christians. Paul, especially, emphasized this idea of the Christian's personal experience of fellowship with the risen and invisible Christ. He even said, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (2 Cor. 5 : 16). Christ, for these ardent believers, was far more a Living Presence than a fond, but fading, memory.

(3) So far as there *was* an interest among them in the historical career of Jesus, it seemed quite natural for them to depend on the stories which Peter and John and James and the other apostles could tell them. For were not these men living eye-witnesses of these things? Was it not far more satisfactory to listen to the words of one who had been there, who had heard with his own ears and seen with his own eyes the wonderful things that Jesus had taught and done? As long as these men who had known Jesus personally could travel about among the churches and talk about him out of their own personal recollections, no great need was felt for written records of his career.

(4) As the new religion spread and new churches were formed, it soon became neces-

sary to arrange for some sort of systematic instruction for the new converts in matters pertaining to their new way of life. Many of these new Christians, especially in the Gentile cities outside of Palestine, knew absolutely nothing about Jesus except what they had heard from the missionaries who had led them to accept the new faith. They believed that Christ was an invisible, spiritual Presence, who could help them to live better lives, and who was soon to appear visibly and set up his wonderful reign in Jerusalem. The next step necessary was to gather these new disciples into instruction classes. Older and more mature Christians were appointed to teach them. The main subject of instruction was, of course, the meaning and the duties of the Christian life, so that they might live worthily while they waited and watched for their Master. Yet there must also have been some time spent in telling the stories of Jesus' earthly career, which these teachers knew from their own experience or had heard from the apostles. Through this system of instruction classes there soon grew up a collection of stories about Jesus which were used to illustrate and enforce the duties of the Christian life. Only the most useful stories were thus preserved, and these were told and re-told until their literary form had been

made as perfect as possible. This collection of stories was preserved by memorizing them — an accomplishment in which the ancients far excelled us; and as long as memorizing seemed sufficient, it was not felt necessary to go to the great labour (in those days) of reducing them to writing.

7. **How the Gospels came to be written.** As time went on, however, each of these reasons for not putting the stories of Jesus into writing became at last an actual reason for writing them down.

(1) Since the earliest disciples confidently expected Jesus' visible return to them during their own lifetime, they naturally felt that there was no great need for preserving written accounts of his former career. His new presence and further teaching would soon satisfy all their needs. But the years slipped rapidly by, and no such event occurred as they were fondly expecting. Jesus did not miraculously descend from heaven with his angels in clouds of glory. At last, when Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the national life of the Jews had come to an end, and even then Jesus had not reappeared, the Christians began to realize that they must have misunderstood his teaching and the teaching of their prophets. At any rate, they perceived that if he was really going to

come back in the way they had expected, this event was not going to happen in the lifetime of most of those who had known him during his former career on earth. This need of revising their beliefs about his second coming led them to see that it was time to have some permanent record of the events and teachings of his earthly life.

(2) The early Christians had been quite right in insisting that spiritual fellowship with the living, invisible Christ was the very foundation of the Christian life. But when people start out to live such a life of communion with an unseen Presence, they need something more than their own imagination or feelings to tell them what sort of a Being their unseen Lord is and what things he expects of them. Without the example of his earthly life and teachings they could not know whether the suggestions that came to them in their moments of prayer or devotion, the promptings of conscience, the visions inspired by exalted feelings, the ideas resulting from careful reflection, were really his voice or not. The result of neglecting the careful study of his earthly life was that "Christian experience" came to be a term that sanctioned every imaginable variety and extravagance of feeling and thought, from trance-like emotional states to conduct

that was actually immoral. Gradually it was perceived that the true experience of communion with the living Christ must be guided, checked, standardized, by referring it always to an authoritative record of what Jesus had taught and done in his visible, earthly life.

(3) As the years sped on, the help which the Church had received from the reports of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus, began to fail. The apostles died. Beginning with James, who was put to death by Herod, the men who had been Jesus' closest companions one by one "fell asleep," and the Church could no longer turn to them for personal recollections of the Master. This fact, too, became at last a strong incentive to writing the records of Jesus' career, so as to preserve them in some permanent and authoritative form before it was too late.

(4) We have referred to the instruction classes, and the collection of stories, or "oral tradition," that grew up by this means. These stories were repeated from memory, and thus taught to others, who also memorized and repeated them. But even the wonderful capacity of the ancient Oriental world for memorizing had its limits. Sooner or later, such a method of preserving the life of Christ was sure to result in changes in

the stories, unintentional inaccuracies or prejudiced interpretations; and there came a time at last when it was felt to be necessary to get this oral tradition written down, to save it from becoming unreliable.

8. **Religious controversy reflected in the Gospels.** The new religion of Christ did not spread and establish itself without a great deal of opposition. Its new way of life had to struggle hard against competing views and practices. While the Gospels were not intended primarily for the purposes of religious controversy, there are, nevertheless, many traces to be found in them of the conflicts that were going on at the time they were written. These traces are, naturally, not obvious to the casual reader, but they become apparent when the Gospels are studied in the light of some previous knowledge of the conditions of the times.

During the first century the opposition to Christianity came from three main sources.

(1) **Judaism.** The earliest Christians were all adherents of the Jewish religion. They seemed to consider their new faith as a new branch of Judaism. Many of them felt that it was terribly wrong to abandon the Jewish rites and ceremonies that had always been a part of their religion. Consequently, not only from those Jews who never became Chris-

tians at all, but even from within the ranks of the Church itself, there was strong opposition to any view of the new faith that tended to make it independent of the traditional religion of Israel.

Paul was the leader who saw most clearly that the religion of Christ must break away completely from everything that was merely Jewish, if it was ever to spread and become a permanent world-religion. Heroically he set himself to this task. It involved him in constant controversy, often extremely bitter, with the Jewish faction in the Church. But he succeeded, and to his success is due the fact that the religion of Christ survived the catastrophe that finally overthrew the Jewish temple and destroyed the Jewish nation.

While this great controversy with Judaism centered about the apostle Paul, there are many traces of it reflected in the Gospels. The writers of our Gospels found it necessary again and again to tell their story in such a way as to remind their readers that this Christ about whom they were writing was not merely a Jewish Messiah, but the Saviour of the world.

(2) **Paganism.** The new religion also had to make its way against the competition and opposition of the heathen spirit of the Roman civilization, and this rivalry often involved

controversy and persecution. The pagan spirit of Rome came into conflict with the early Church in three forms: the popular heathen religion, which was a crude and often vulgar idol-worship; Roman politics, which had exalted the emperor into an object of religious worship, largely for political purposes; and the general social life of the times, which was fearfully degraded and immoral. Against each of these forms of opposition the Christian religion had to take a strong stand. Christians must have nothing to do with the religious observances of the heathen temples; they must acknowledge the emperor as their lawful ruler, but must refuse absolutely to worship him as a god; and they must separate themselves completely from the immorality that was so common that society no longer condemned it. All this involved steadfastness, loyalty even to the point of martyrdom, and a spirit of uncompromising separation from the world, that made the Christian life an unceasing struggle. Our Gospels show many indications of this conflict that put Christianity and the "world" into such direct opposition to each other.

(3) **Gnosticism.** In some sections of the early Church, leaders who were versed in the various heathen philosophies of the time tried to harmonize the teachings of these

philosophies with the teachings of Christianity. These efforts resulted in the great movement known as "gnosticism." The clearest thinkers in the Church, however, realized that these gnostic views were a compromise between Christianity and heathenism which really undermined all that was most essential and valuable in Christianity. Consequently they declared war to the finish against these gnostic teachers, in order that they might keep Christianity pure and true to the spirit and teachings of its Founder. The gnostic movement came to its height after the first century, but the first traces of it appeared before the apostles were dead, and reflections of Paul's opposition to it are to be found especially in his epistle to the Colossians. Among the Gospels it is John's that shows a special interest in this subject. For this was the latest of the Gospels, and was written in Ephesus, which was one of the important centers of the new gnostic philosophy. It is one of the main objects of John's Gospel to insist that the Christian faith must be built directly upon the foundation of the historical life of Jesus, and not allowed to go wandering off into the mists of philosophical speculations.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

VON SODEN, *History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 1–20, 121–127.
KENT, *Life and Teachings of Jesus*, ch. IV.
SCOTT, *Apologetic of the New Testament*, ch. I.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Which Gospel is the longest? shortest? earliest? latest? How many chapters in each Gospel? What is the approximate date of each Gospel? Which Gospels contain stories of the birth and infancy of Jesus? At what points in his life do the others begin?

2. What was Paul's greatest service to the Christian religion?

3. In what sense is it fair to say that Jesus was the founder of the Christian religion? Peter? Paul?

4. Of the four reasons given for finally putting the Gospels into permanent written form, which do you think was the *first* reason to influence the Gospel writers? Which was the *strongest* in its incentive? Which the most important from the standpoint of the centuries that have followed?

5. What seems to be the probable reason why we have four Gospels, and only four, in our New Testament? Preserve your answer for possible correction in view of the chapters following.

6. Why do all the Gospels give nearly one-fourth of their space to the events immediately connected with the *death* of Jesus?

7. What subjects of religious controversy among the early Christians are reflected in the following: Mark 7: 19, "making all meats clean" (cf. Romans 14); Mark 10 : 42–44; John 18 : 36; John 1 : 14?

OUTLINE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

I Superscription, 1 : 1.

II Preparation for Jesus' Public Career, 1 : 2–13.

III The Galilean Ministry, 1 : 14 — 7 : 23.

1 Jesus' Rise to Fame, 1 : 14–45.
The first preaching, disciples, miracles.

2 The Beginnings of Opposition, 2 : 1 — 3 : 6.
Five hostile criticisms by the Pharisees.

3 Results, 3 : 7–35.
Crowds excited; apostles chosen; scribes opposing; brethren worried.

4 Teaching by Parables, 4 : 1–34.
An attempt to reach the people by a new method.

5 Miracles of Power, 4 : 35 — 5 : 43.
Jesus' control over nature, demons, disease and death.

6 The Climax of Jesus' Fame, ch. 6.
His work is about to develop into a mass-movement.

7 Jesus' Work Stopped by the Pharisees, 7 : 1–23.

IV Journeys in the North, 7 : 24 — 9 : 50.

1 Ministry in Phoenicia and Northern Galilee, 7 : 24 — 8 : 26.
Jesus seeks obscurity, in order to teach his disciples.

2 The Crisis at Caesarea Philippi, 8 : 27 — 9 : 29.
Peter's confession leads Jesus to speak plainly about his coming death and resurrection.

3 Teaching about Greatness and Peace, 9 : 30–50.

V THE LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM, ch. 10.
Teachings about divorce, children, riches, true greatness; healing of blind Bartimaeus.

VI THE MESSIANIC ANNOUNCEMENT, 11 1–26.
Jesus' claims set forth symbolically by the entrance into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, and the withering of the fig-tree.

VII CONFLICT WITH THE JEWISH LEADERS, 11 : 27 — 12 : 40.
Controversies in which the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus is followed by Jesus' rejection of the Pharisees.

VIII FORECAST OF THE OVERTHROW OF THE TEMPLE, 12 : 41 — 13 : 37.

IX THE DEATH OF JESUS, chs. 14–15.

X THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION, ch. 16.

MARK, THE EARLIEST GOSPEL

CHAPTER II

Mark, the Earliest Gospel

1. **The home and family of John Mark.** In Acts 12 : 11–14 we read that Peter, after he was released from the prison in Jerusalem, hastened to " the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying." These statements introduce us to John Mark, more commonly called Mark,[1] who later became the author of our earliest Gospel. His mother, Mary, was evidently a Christian, and seems to have opened her home as a central meeting-place for the Christians of Jerusalem. Here Mark became acquainted with the leaders of the Christian movement, especially with Peter, with whom he afterwards became closely associated.

2. **Mark's personal contact with Jesus.** Although we have no direct evidence, it is quite possible that the large guest-room on

[1] It was not uncommon for Jews to add Roman surnames to their first, or Jewish, names. In this case Mark (Marcus) is the Roman name, and John the original, or Hebrew, name. Cf. Acts 13: 9.

the second story of Mary's house was the "upper room" where Jesus and his disciples celebrated their last Passover together. The place where this Passover was eaten was some home in which Jesus was already known, and if it was in Mary's house, Mark must have had more than one opportunity to see Jesus and to become acquainted with him.

There is an interesting anecdote related in Mark's Gospel (14 : 51–52) in connection with the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. "And a certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body: and they lay hold on him; but he left the linen cloth, and fled naked." Many scholars have felt that the best explanation of this story is that Mark himself was the "certain young man," though in relating the incident he has modestly refrained from mentioning his own name. If this is true, it confirms the supposition that Mark, while not one of the company of apostles, was nevertheless a devoted friend and follower of Jesus, especially in the last days of the Master's life.

3. **Mark's relation to Paul.** There are many references in Acts and in Paul's letters which show that Mark was one of the active workers in the missionary efforts of the early church, and sometimes a companion of the

great apostle himself. In Acts 11 : 30 we read that Barnabas and Saul (Paul) came from Antioch to Jerusalem to bring a gift for the famine-stricken Christians in Jerusalem. Barnabas was John Mark's cousin (Col. 4 : 10), so it is altogether probable that they were Mary's guests. When they left Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 25), they took Mark with them to Antioch, and from there the three men set out on a missionary tour together (13 : 4–5). When they reached Pamphylia, Mark left them and returned home (13 : 13). No reason is given for his return. Some have thought he was unable to stand the hardships of missionary life. Others have suggested that his mother's failing health may have made it unwise for him to remain away longer. Whatever the reason was, Paul did not like it, for later, when he was starting out on a new journey, it was suggested that he take Mark along with him, and he objected strongly, and seems to have felt that Mark had been unfaithful in leaving him on the previous journey (15 : 36–40). The outcome was that Paul and Silas started off together for a long missionary tour, while Mark and his cousin Barnabas were sent out on a shorter journey, to visit the Christians in Cyprus.

The disagreement with Paul was healed over in time, for some years later we find

Paul in his letters speaking of Mark as his "fellow-worker" (Philemon 24), and as "useful" to him (2 Timothy 4 : 11), and instructing the Christians in Colossae to receive Mark kindly when he visits them (Col. 4 : 10).

4. **Mark's relation to Peter.** After Paul's death Mark became the companion and helper of Peter. He had known Peter, of course, in the old Jerusalem days, when his mother's home was the general meeting-place of the Christians in Jerusalem. The influence of Peter upon the young John Mark in those days can scarcely be over-estimated. Peter was recognized by all as the leader of the apostolic band, a position which he held not only by the command of Christ himself, but because of his natural gifts of leadership. To Peter, therefore, more than to any one else, these early disciples, like Mark, looked for instruction and guidance. Peter, just because he had given early promise of leadership, had been given exceptional opportunities by Jesus to share intimately his ideals and his spirit. He had devoted himself to Jesus with all the splendid powers of his keen, questioning mind, his ardent and often rash enthusiasm, and his dominating energy, and now out of his rich experience with the Master he was giving himself without stint to the group of disciples

who looked to him for inspiration and teaching. To all this activity of Peter, Mark responded by catching his spirit and even his very phraseology, so that Mark's Jesus was essentially Jesus as he was reflected through the personality of Simon Peter. The collection of narratives and reminiscences which Mark later arranged into his "Gospel" are thus stamped with the individuality of Peter no less than with that of Mark himself.

So we are not surprised to find Mark and Peter together in the last years of the latter's life. In the first epistle of Peter, the apostle writes from Rome, which the early Christians had nicknamed "Babylon," because of its greatness and its wickedness. He says, "She (the church) that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark, my son" (1 Peter 5 : 13). Here we see Mark, now a mature Christian and an experienced missionary, living in Rome with the aged Peter, who depends on him for help and loves him as a son. It was soon after the death of Peter, while Mark was probably still living in Rome, that the earliest of our Gospels was written.

5. **Religious instruction in the early Church.** As long as the Christian movement was confined to Jerusalem and the regions where Jesus had lived and worked, his apostles

could appeal confidently to their hearers' own knowledge to confirm the things they preached about him. No public character was better known in his own country than Jesus. But when the gospel began to spread beyond the borders of Palestine, and Gentiles, who knew nothing of Jesus, nor even of the Jewish Scriptures, began to respond to the missionary appeal, it became necessary at once to describe the career of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection,[1] more fully to the new audiences. As little groups of converts were organized into local assemblies, or "churches," it became important to instruct them regarding the meaning and duties of the Christian life. The apostles could not do much of this work; they were needed for the frontier work of carrying the gospel into new regions. It was necessary that gifted young men should be found, who, either from their own knowledge of Jesus, or from careful instructions from the apostles, or both combined, could teach the new Christians the great facts about Jesus on which the new religion rested. At first, as we have seen in the last chapter, the subject matter of such teaching was largely the doctrines about

[1] See 1 Cor. 1 : 24, as suggesting the reason why it was so hard for Jews to think of the crucified Jesus as their Messiah — a contradiction in terms! — *Ed.*

Jesus, by means of which the apostles explained his atoning death, his relation to God, and his authority over the lives of his followers. But more and more they came to support these doctrines by narrating the events, the deeds and the sayings of the Lord. Thus the new Christians were instructed in the faith.

John Mark may have been one of these teachers. His personal character and gifts, and the fact that he had known Jesus personally, would make him one of the most useful of this group of workers. His long experience with Paul helped him to understand thoroughly Paul's teachings about Christ, and his position as companion and helper of Peter gave him an opportunity to learn many additional details about Jesus' deeds and teachings. Probably no one in the whole body of early Christians was better qualified to write the first reliable story of the career of the Master.

6. **What the early Church Fathers say about Mark and his Gospel.** Many writings of the leaders of the Church in the days just following the apostles have been preserved, in whole or in part, and there are several references in these writings to Mark and his Gospel. Selecting only the oldest and most trustworthy of these passages, we

may quote them to show how all we have said about Mark as the author of the earliest Gospel is confirmed.

Shortly after the death of Peter, the church in Hierapolis, in Asia Minor, was in charge of a man named Papias. Papias may have known some of the apostles personally; at any rate, he knew many of their intimate friends. He wrote a book called "Interpretation of the Sayings of the Lord." This book has been lost, but some passages from it have been preserved through quotations in other writings made before it disappeared. The passage we are interested in is quoted by Eusebius, who wrote a history of the Church, in the first part of the fourth century. This is what Papias says about Mark, according to Eusebius' quotation:

"And the Elder said this also: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down everything that he remembered, without, however, recording in order what was either said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him; but afterwards, as I said (attended), Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs (of his hearers), but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles (words). So then Mark made no mistake while he thus wrote down some

things as he remembered them, for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard, or to set down any false statement therein."[1]

Irenaeus, the great leader of the church in Lyons, was one of Papias' disciples. In a quotation from one of his writings, made by Eusebius in the Church History just referred to, Irenaeus says:

"After the departure of these (Peter and Paul), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing what had been preached by Peter."[2]

Finally, Eusebius himself, in his History, says:

"So greatly, however, did the splendour of piety enlighten the minds of Peter's hearers, that it was not sufficient to hear but once, nor to receive the unwritten doctrine of the gospel of God, but they persevered in every variety of entreaties, to solicit Mark, as the companion of Peter, and whose Gospel we have, that he should leave them in writing a monument of the doctrine thus orally communicated. Nor did they cease their solicitations until they had prevailed with the man, and thus became the cause of that history

[1] Eusebius, H. E., iii, 39 (translated by Lightfoot, Apostolic Fathers).

[2] Eusebius, H. E., v, 8 (Kruse).

which is called the Gospel according to Mark."[1]

7. **The writing of Mark's Gospel.** These quotations, together with the facts gathered from the New Testament itself, are sufficient to give us a good working theory of the writing of our earliest Gospel. In Mark's Gospel we have a record of Jesus' words and deeds, written by Mark, chiefly from information given him by Peter. It is impossible, of course, to say in detail just how much of the Gospel is the original work of Mark and how much is really due to the apostle. The remarkably vivid style, reflecting faithfully so many of the picturesque details of Jesus' surroundings, and of his very movements and appearance, is probably the result of Mark's loyal reproduction of the very language in which Peter used to tell the stories of the Master's life. The arrangement of the stories into their natural order, to form a continuous narrative of Jesus' career, is probably due to Mark himself. Thus, so closely are the influence of Peter and the work of Mark intermingled in this Gospel, that it would hardly be an exaggeration to re-name the Gospel the "Gospel according to Peter and Mark."

The story of how Mark was led to under-

[1] Eusebius, H. E., ii, 15 (Kruse).

take the work, and how the aged apostle instructed and encouraged him, is beautifully told by Edgar Lee Masters in his poem, "The Gospel of Mark."[1]

But Mark, my son, there's Rome below you there —
What temples, arches, under the full moon!
Here let us sit beside this chestnut tree,
And while the soft wind blows out of the sea
Let's finish up our talks. You must know all
Wherewith to write the story e'er I die
Beneath the wrath of Nero. See that light,
Faint like a little candle, — I passed there.
That's one of our poor men, they make us lamps
Wherewith to light the streets and Nero's gardens.
We shall be lamps they'll wish to snuff in time.
We met tonight at one Silvanus' house,
And I was telling them about the night
When in Gethsemane you followed Him,
Having a cloth about your naked body.
And how you laid hold on him, left the cloth
And fled. But when you write this, you can say,
"A certain young man," leaving out your name,

[1] "The Gospel of Mark" by Edgar Lee Masters; The Great Valley, p. 147.

You may not wish to have it known 'twas you
Who ran away, as I would like to hide
How I fell into sleep and failed to watch
And afterwards declared I knew Him not:
But as for me, omit no thing. The world
Will gain for seeing me rise out of weakness
To strength, and out of fear to boldness. Time
Has wrought his wonders in me, I am rock.
Let hell beat on me, I shall stand from now!

Then don't forget the first man that he healed.
There's deep significance in this, my son,
That first of all he'd take an unclean spirit
And cast it out. Then second was my mother
Cured of her fever, just as you might say:
Be rid of madness, things that tear and plague,
Then cool you of the fever of vain life.
But don't forget to write how he would say
" Tell no man of this," say that and no more.
Though I may think he said it lest the crowds
That followed him would take his strength for healing,
And leave no strength for words, let be and write
" Tell no man of this," simply. For you see
These madmen quieted, these lepers cleansed

Had soon to die, all now are dead, perhaps.
And with them ends their good. But what
he said
Remains for generations yet to come, with
power
To heal and heal. My son, preserve your
notes,
Of what I've told you, even above your life.
Make many copies lest one script be lost.
I shall not to another tell it all
As I have told it you.
But as for me
What merit have I that I saw and said
" Thou art the Christ "? One sees the thing
he sees.

. . . . . .

The lawyers said there's nothing in this
fellow.
His family beheld no wonder in him.
Have Mary Magdalene and I invented
These words, this story? — who are we to
do so, —
A fallen woman and a fisherman!
Or did this happen? Did we see these
things?
Did Mary see him risen, and did I?

. . . . . .

And I declare to you that untold millions
In centuries untold will live and die
By these words which you write, as I have
told them.
And nation after nation will be moulded,

As heated wax is moulded, by these words.
And spirits in their inmost power will feel
Change and regeneration through them —

. . . . . .

Go write what I have told you, come what will
I'm going to the catacombs to pray.

8. **The date of Mark's Gospel.** The quotations given from the early Church Fathers suggest that Mark did not write his Gospel until after the death of Peter. The special attention given in chapter 13 to Christ's teaching about the destruction of the temple suggests, further, that the Gospel was written very close to that event. But it is very difficult to determine whether it was composed just before or just after that great catastrophe. We have therefore placed the date of the Gospel at A.D. 70, the year of the destruction of Jerusalem, though it may have been a very short time either earlier or later.

9. **The vivid narrative style of Mark.** One cannot read Mark without being impressed with the rapidity of movement which characterizes his story of Jesus. From the very first paragraph there is something new happening every moment. This sense of movement gives the Gospel a peculiar attractiveness to modern readers. It is due in part to

the small amount of space given to the sayings of Jesus. It is a Gospel of deeds rather than of teachings. This stands out very clearly as one compares Mark with Matthew and Luke. The Sermon on the Mount is not reported at all in Mark; there are only six parables; and the three most important discourses, the instructions to the Twelve (chapter 3), the parables by the sea (chapter 4), and the forecast of the destruction of the temple (chapter 13), are all given in much shorter form than in Matthew and Luke. This absence of long discourses makes the movement of the story just so much more condensed and rapid.

The literary style, moreover, is remarkably simple, straightforward and picturesque. The author is fond of concrete, illustrative words, when other writers would have used more abstract expressions. Observe the frequent use of the "historical present," as, for example, "there cometh to him a leper" (1 : 40); "they come, bringing unto him a man sick of the palsy" (2 : 3); "and straightway, while he yet spake, cometh Judas" (14 : 43). Many little realistic touches are given to the story which are not found in the other Gospels, such as the multitudes crowding about him so that he could not eat (3 : 20); Jesus sleeping on the cushion of the boat

(4 : 38); Jesus' sigh, when the Pharisees asked him for a sign (8 : 12). Observe also the frequent use of the word "straightway," especially in the opening chapters.

10. **Mark's extreme candor and boldness.** Mark's realism goes further than just his picturesque diction. It is seen also in the unreserved manner in which he tells his story. He tells many things about Christ and his apostles that other more cautious writers would omit, for fear that unsympathetic readers would get a wrong impression of the greatness and perfection of Jesus and the dignity of his apostles. Such frankness in details, where Matthew or Luke would either omit or soften down the language used, indicates that Mark's chief interest was in reporting faithfully his own or Peter's personal recollections of Jesus. Whether his statements matched the theories that had been thought out to explain the unique personality of Christ, or not, was a matter of quite secondary concern to Mark. His chief business was to record the facts as accurately and as completely as he knew them; he was quite willing to leave to others the framing of such theories about Christ as the facts might warrant.

A few illustrations of this unreserved manner of Mark may be given, from among

the many details which he gives in his story, which the other Gospels either omit or soften down, perhaps from reasons of prudence. Thus Jesus is described as angry, or indignant, in 3 : 5; 10 : 14. In 3 : 21, he is suspected of insanity by his friends. In 6 : 5, he is unable to perform miracles (cf. Matthew 13 : 58). Compare also the straightforward, blunt statement of Jesus in Mark 10 : 18 with the softer, less perplexing statement attributed to him in the corresponding passage in Matthew 19 : 17.

11. **The Gospel was written for Gentile readers.** It is quite clear that Mark intended his Gospel for circulation among non-Jewish Christians, probably in the neighborhood of Rome. This is evident from the fact that there are very few quotations from the Old Testament; there are constant explanations of Jewish or Aramaic[1] words or phrases; and references to Jewish customs are frequently explained.

Jewish or Aramaic words or phrases are explained in 3 : 17; 5 : 41; 7 : 11; 7 : 34; 10 : 46; 14 : 36; 15 : 22; 15 : 34. For examples of Jewish customs that needed to be explained to the readers, see 7 : 3, 4; 12 : 18; 14 : 12; 15 : 6; 15 : 42. Such explana-

[1] Aramaic was the common language of Palestine in the time of Jesus and his apostles. See page 97.

tions would not have been needed except among non-Jewish readers. The frequent occurrence of Latin terms, like denarius ("shilling") (6 : 37), centurion (15 : 39), census ("tribute") (12 : 14), praetorium (15 : 16), suggests that the book was written among Roman Christians, and was intended first of all for Roman readers.

12. **What Mark thought of Christ.** The picture of Jesus that was in Mark's mind, and that he wished to impress upon his readers, was that of an active, ministering Saviour. His conception of Christ was, of course, largely derived from Peter, whose ideas and teachings are as strongly reflected in this Gospel as Mark's own. Peter's thought of Christ is well summed up in his words to Cornelius, in Acts 10 : 38: "Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

Jesus is emphasized in this Gospel as the Servant of God and man. Mark's portrait of him reminds us strongly of those great poetic portraits of the "Servant of Jehovah" in the Old Testament, the most wonderful of which is in Isaiah 52 : 13 to 53 : 12. This magnificent poem describes the character of a man who lacked all those outward dis-

tinguishing marks of rank or fortune that so commonly commend a man to the attention of others, but whose active sympathy gathered into his own heart the sorrows and wrongs of his fellows, even to the point of suffering an undeserved death; and declares that such is the ideal man, the true " Servant " of Jehovah, the man in whom God is well pleased. If one studies carefully Peter's references to Christ in the early chapters of Acts,[1] it will be seen that Peter had that great poem in mind as he described his Master. He saw in Jesus a true fulfillment of that wonderful poetic portrait.

Moreover, a careful study of Jesus' own experiences and words, especially in connection with his baptism, temptation and early preaching, will show that he himself believed that this prophetic poem described the most perfect life possible to man, and that he consciously adopted it as his model, and gave himself up to living just that sort of a life. We see him, in Mark's Gospel especially, spending himself in sympathetic and self-sacrificing service for others, identifying himself fully with the infirmities and sorrows of men and the sufferings caused by their sins, relieving every sort of disability and redeeming every sort of failure, just as far as men

[1] Acts 3 : 13, 18, 26; 4 : 27–28, 30. Cf. also 8 : 32–35.

were willing to accept his helping ministry; and finally, in the great sacrifice of the cross, suffering an unjust death, and in it rendering his supreme service to men for their redemption.

The key-note of Mark's Gospel is the word of Jesus in 10 : 45: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

13. **Mark's view of Christianity.** The Christianity of Mark's Gospel is the sort that finds its chief expression in deeds of service, performed in the name or spirit of Christ, for the help of men. It is a Christianity that does not deem the lowliest or smallest deed of helpfulness unworthy of the spirit of any earnest Christian, and which at the same time does not shrink from the hardest and most heroic sacrifice on behalf of others. No Christianity that exhausts itself in private religious emotions can find a warrant in Mark's portrait of Jesus Christ. Prayer, worship, meditation, are all vitally necessary, yet they are never to be regarded as the final ends of the Christian life. They are indispensable means of keeping oneself in tune with Christ, of cultivating the sense of Christ's comradeship in the tasks of life; but the final proofs of one's Christianity, according to this earliest Gospel, are to be found out

among one's fellows, in the sympathetic bearing of others' burdens, and the unmeasured devotion to Christ's enterprise of lifting the world of selfish, sinning, weakened men and women into a clearer and more helpful relation to God.

No salvation that seeks safety merely, some easy and private immunity from the consequences of wrong-doing, can find a sanction in this Gospel. Mark's type of Christian is saved to serve. He is one who has caught the spirit of Mark's Christ, and who straightway makes his own comfort or satisfaction a very secondary matter. Side by side with his Master, he throws himself into self-forgetting ministry to others. If he ever does "save his own soul," it will be because he has thus "lost" it in the service of God and man.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

GOODSPEED, *Story of the New Testament*, ch. VIII.

BURTON, *Short Introduction to the Gospels*, ch. II.

BACON, *Making of the New Testament*, ch. VII (pp. 154–173).

VON SODEN, *History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 153–164.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Read the Gospel of Mark through, at one sitting, if possible, following the Outline on page 21. Note what seem to you to be (1) the three or four chief *crises* in the career of Jesus; (2) the accumulation of circumstances that brought on each crisis; (3) the alternatives between which he had to choose at the critical moment; (4) the results that followed his decision in each case.

2. How much time would have been required for such a public ministry as Mark records, if there were no long intervals of time between the various events? Try to appreciate the fact that the deeds and sayings of Jesus that have been preserved are only a minute fragment of a busy career that lasted some three years.

3. In selecting these particular incidents and sayings for his Gospel, what motives influenced Mark?

4. Make a list of the parables in Mark. In 4 : 1, what indications do you find that Jesus was making an important change in his preaching plans at this time? Why did he adopt the method of preaching by parables?

5. Do you find any indication in Mark that Jesus expected his followers to organize themselves into the "Christian Church" after his death? What, according to chapter 13, did he expect would happen after his death and resurrection? How soon? What is he anxious his disciples shall do *before* that time (13 :10)? Why?

OUTLINE OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

I Genealogy, Birth and Infancy of Jesus, chs. 1–2.

II Preparation for Jesus' Public Career, 3 : 1 — 4 : 11.
(Given with greater fullness than in Mark.)

III The Galilean Ministry, 4 : 12 — 15 : 20.
(Most of the incidents, but only a small portion of the teachings, are found in Mark. Compare each section with the corresponding section in the Outline of Mark, page 21.)
1 Jesus' Rise to Fame, 4 : 12–25.
2 The Sermon on the Mount (description of the Kingdom), ch. 5–7.
3 Ten Miracles (the blessings of the Kingdom), 8 : 1 — 9 : 34.
4 Sending Forth the Disciples (instructions concerning the propaganda of the Kingdom) 9 : 35 — 10 : 42.
5 Results—general unresponsiveness, ch. 11–12.
6 Teaching by Parables, 13 : 1–53.
7 The Climax of Jesus' Fame, 13 : 54 — 14: 36.
8 Jesus' Work Stopped by the Pharisees, 15 : 1–20.

IV Journeys in the North, 15 : 21 — 18 : 35.
1 Ministry in Phoenicia and Northern Galilee, 15 : 21 — 16 : 12.
Follows Mark, omitting two miracles recorded by Mark.
2 The Crisis at Caesarea Philippi, 16 : 13 — 17 : 20.
Follows Mark, adding teaching about the Church, 16 : 17–21.
3 Teachings about Greatness and Forgiveness, 17 : 22 — 18 : 35.
Almost wholly different from Mark.

V The Last Journey to Jerusalem, ch. 19, 20.
Follows Mark, with the addition of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, 20 : 1–16.

VI The Messianic Announcement, 21 : 1–22.
Follows Mark.

VII Conflict with the Jewish Leaders, 21 : 23 — 23 : 39.

Follows Mark, with the addition of the parables of the two sons, and the marriage feast, 21 : 28–32 and 22 : 1–14. The section on the denunciation of the Pharisees is much longer than Mark's.

VIII Forecast of the Overthrow of the Temple, chs. 24, 25.

Follows Mark, omitting Mark's story of the widow's mites, and adding parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the teaching about the judgment.

IX The Death of Jesus, chs. 26, 27.

Follows Mark, omitting the incident of the young man who followed Christ, Mark 14 : 51–52, and adding several minor incidents.

X The Resurrection, ch. 28.

The section on the discovery of the empty tomb is based on Mark; otherwise the story is quite different.

MATTHEW, AND THE "SAYINGS OF JESUS"

CHAPTER III

Matthew, and the "Sayings of Jesus"

1. **Comparison of Matthew with Mark.** If one compares the outline of Matthew with the outline of Mark (pages 21 and 46), or, better still, if one reads the Gospel of Matthew through rapidly with the two outlines before him, he will notice certain traits that are characteristic of Matthew, that stand out all the more prominently in contrast with Mark.

2. **The arrangement of events and sayings into groups.** One of the first features that will be noticed is Matthew's tendency to gather the materials of his Gospel into well-defined groups, each of which has some common idea running through it. Thus, the "Sermon on the Mount" (chapters 5 to 7) gathers together in fairly systematic fashion the great teachings of Jesus about the kingdom of heaven. Chapters 8 and 9 bring together ten miracles of Jesus which in Mark's Gospel are widely separated as to time and place. Chapter 10 presents a series of instructions to the disciples on the subject of service

to Christ, some of which have to do with the tour which they were just beginning, while others have to do with their service to his cause after his death. Chapter 13 collects a series of eight parables about the kingdom of heaven. Chapter 23 presents a group of sayings which condemn the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Chapers 24 and 25 gather together many sayings and parables that deal with the " end of the age."

3. **The constant appeal to Old Testament prophecy.** Scarcely less striking is the large number of quotations from the Old Testament which one finds in Matthew. In Mark there are only a very few such quotations, but in Matthew the Old Testament is quoted at least sixty times. Many of these references occur in Jesus' own sayings; eleven others are introduced by the writer with the formula, " that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," or similar words.[1] These eleven references are especially significant, for they show us that the writer of this Gospel wanted his readers to think of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

These eleven quotations are important for another reason, for we learn from them

[1] 1: 22–23; 2: 5–6, 15, 17–18, 23; 4: 14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13: 35; 21: 4–5; 27: 9–10.

how the writer regarded the Hebrew Scriptures. He shared the common Jewish practice of his time, which used the Old Testament largely as a collection of " proof texts " which could be quoted to support one's own view, sometimes even when the exact wording of the quotation had to be changed,[1] or even when it had to be given a meaning which it did not have in its original Old Testament setting.[2] This method of using the Old Testament is known as the " allegorical " method. It is based on the idea that the Scriptures contain many hidden teachings which may have little or nothing to do with their simple historical sense. These hidden teachings are to be discovered by means of some " key " known only to the initiated. Such a method uses the words of the Bible symbolically, making them stand for ideas not usually expressed by them in common speech. These symbolic meanings, moreover, often flatly contradict the ordinary sense of the words when they are studied as the natural expression of the writer's mind. It was a method much in vogue in Jesus' time, and was used by all the Jewish rabbis in the temple and the synagogues, though Jesus himself did not use it in its extreme

[1] E.g., 2 : 6, 23; 12 : 18–21; 27 : 9–10.

[2] E.g., 1: 23; 2 : 18; 27: 9–10.

form. In the light of modern historical science, this allegorical method of Bible study, in so far as it contradicts or ignores the natural historical meaning of the Bible writers, is thoroughly discredited.

The Jews in the time of Christ, largely by means of this method, had already gathered out of their Scriptures a large number of passages which they said (often mistakenly) referred to their expected Messiah. Hence it was quite natural that the writers of the New Testament, who had been brought up in this view of their ancient Scriptures, should quote the Old Testament more loosely than we would today, and allowance must be made for this when we study their quotations.

4. **Similarities between Matthew and Mark.** A closer comparison of Matthew with Mark shows a third feature, more striking even than that just described. Many passages, some of them of considerable length, are almost word for word the same in Matthew and Mark. Two or three of the most remarkable illustrations of this statement may be given. Of course the fact can be seen and studied better by comparing the two Gospels in the original Greek; yet our English translation will answer sufficiently for our purpose.

Compare, for example, Matthew 13 : 1–2

with Mark 4 : 1–2. Without extending the comparison on into the actual words of Jesus, which we might expect would be the same if they were correctly reported, it is very striking that both Gospels introduce the parable of the sower in almost exactly the same words. So, again, the story of Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14 : 22–33 and Mark 6 : 45–52) is told in almost exactly the same language in both Gospels. In the story of the healing of the paralytic (Matthew 9 : 1–8 and Mark 2 : 1–12) most of the details are told in precisely the same language; in the verse " but that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith unto the sick of the palsy) . . . " even the parenthesis occurs in precisely the same place and the same form in the two accounts. Such close likeness between these two Gospels cannot have been an accident.

5. **The plan of the Gospel is argumentative.** It is clear that Matthew's purpose in writing this Gospel was not so much to give a connected, chronological account of Jesus' career, as to prove by selected incidents from that career that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. His habit of collecting his material into groups around some topic, such as the kingdom of heaven, miracles, " woes," etc., shows that he does

not hesitate to take some of the events and sayings of Jesus out of their actual order and put them together so as to give a single impression of what Jesus did or taught about some specific matter. This does not mean that Matthew's Gospel is merely a topical description of Jesus' life and ministry, but only that the writer does frequently change the order of events for the sake of giving his readers a strong impressionistic portrait of Jesus as the Messiah.

6. **The Gospel was written for Jewish readers** (i.e., Jewish Christians). As we have seen in Chapter I, by the time the Gospels were written there were Christian churches scattered far and wide, some of them composed chiefly of converted Jews, others chiefly of converted Gentiles. The Jewish Christians differed from their Gentile fellow-Christians in one very important respect. They had been brought up on the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the Gentiles had not. These Jewish Christians had grown up to regard their Scriptures with great reverence, and they would be very slow to accept the claims made for Christ unless they could be convinced that this Christ was really the One whom they believed was foretold in their sacred writings. It was especially for the instruction of these Jewish

Christians that the Gospel of Matthew was written.

This fact, which is already abundantly clear from the constant appeal to Old Testament passages, is also confirmed by the way in which the writer refers to Jewish customs and ceremonies, assuming that his readers are already familiar with them. A good illustration of this is the reference to the Jewish custom of ceremonial washings, in Matt. 15 : 2, which should be compared with Mark's elaborate explanation of the same custom (Mark 7 : 3–4).

7. **Matthew's Gospel is based on Mark.** The striking similarities which we have noticed between this Gospel and Mark can best be explained by assuming that the writer of Matthew must have been acquainted with the Gospel of Mark, and must either have had a copy of it before him when he wrote, copying almost word for word large portions of it into his own story; or else must have come to know it almost by heart, so that he could quote much of it from memory.

If one will compare the two Gospels carefully, by means of a good "Synopsis," or edition which prints the Gospels in parallel columns, he will discover that the general outline of Jesus' career, beginning with his baptism and ending with his resurrection, is

the same in Matthew as in Mark. Matthew has evidently used Mark's Gospel as the framework of his own story of Jesus, changing a few passages here and there, or re-arranging their order, so as to suit his purpose, and also adding a large amount of other material which is not found in Mark.

8. **The "Sayings of Jesus."** A study of those sections which are not found in Mark shows that they are mostly sayings of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount, most of the teachings in the instructions to the disciples (chapter 10), or the sermon about the "end of the age" (chapters 24 and 25). Nearly all New Testament scholars have come to the conclusion that there must have been in existence before Matthew's Gospel was written, a book in which some one had gathered together many of the best-remembered sayings, or teachings, of Jesus. It is probable that this book, which was used, like Mark, as a basis of instruction for Christian converts, was written even earlier than Mark's Gospel, although there is some reason to think that Mark himself was acquainted with it. It is probable that this collection of Jesus' sayings, or the *Logia*,[1] as scholars today call it, was written by Matthew, or Levi, one of the twelve apostles, and that it was the earliest

[1] From the Greek word for "sayings."

attempt to put any record of Jesus' career into writing. No copy of the *Logia* in its original form has ever been discovered in the ancient tombs or libraries that have yielded so many priceless manuscripts to the explorer. But it is barely possible that some copy of it will yet be unearthed.

9. **How Matthew's Gospel was written.** We are now in position to construct a working theory of how this Gospel came to be written. Some teacher among the Jewish Christians of those early days, living perhaps in Palestine, became acquainted with Mark's Gospel, which had been published a few years before. He was already acquainted with the *Logia;* perhaps he had been using it for some years already in his teaching work. When he came to know Mark's Gospel, or possibly to secure a copy of his own, he saw how useful it would be to write a longer story of Jesus' career which would combine the two. That is what this Gospel is: a combination of Mark and the *Logia*, woven together into a continuous story,[1] and arranged in such a way as to show its readers that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah of their Scriptures.

We see also how this Gospel came to be

[1] With a few additional narratives, like the stories of the ancestry, birth and infancy of Christ, chapters 1 and 2.

called the "Gospel according to Matthew." If Matthew was indeed the writer of the *Logia*, it was quite natural that the new book should be given his name, because he was responsible for the really important parts of it that were not already known as "Mark." And it is quite proper that we should continue to call it "Matthew's Gospel," in recognition of this same fact.

10. **Why this Gospel was written.** Matthew's Gospel was written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem. It was later than Mark's, however, so we have placed its date upon our diagram (frontispiece) as approximately A.D. 75.

The Jewish Christians, for whom it was written, were facing several grave questions. They had never broken away from the belief that the Christ whom they accepted was in some way connected with a triumphant future for the Jewish nation. It was that hope that had led them to accept him as their Messiah. They believed that God was going to establish a great kingdom on the earth, with the Jewish people as the political center of it. When the armies of Titus, after a fearful siege lasting five months, overthrew their holy city, desecrated and destroyed their temple, and scattered far and wide the remnant of Jews who survived the attack,

their faith in Jesus was sorely shaken. Could this Jesus, after all, be the true Messiah? What had become of the kingdom of God? How could they explain the sudden and complete elimination of their nation from the stage of history?

Matthew's Gospel was written to furnish these Jewish Christians with the true answers to these questions, and its permanent value is discovered in just these answers which it gives.

11. **The Messiahship of Jesus.** To reassure his readers that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah, the writer of this Gospel had to show them (1) that Jesus did indeed fulfill the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures; (2) but that the meaning of his Messiahship was something more spiritual and less political than they had supposed.

That is the reason for the constant appeal to Old Testament prophecy, which we have already noted as one of the outstanding characteristics of this Gospel. The writer shared the prevailing attitude of his time toward the Old Testament, and, as we have seen, sometimes quoted it in a loose and unscientific way that would be quite unconvincing to a modern reader. Nevertheless, his defects in this regard were not apparent to his first readers, for they shared them;

and by his many references to prophetic "proof texts" he made an argument for the Messiahship of Jesus that was quite satisfying and convincing to them. And his whole story reveals how the Lord, whose deep spiritual insight was never satisfied with anything that was merely superficial, saw in the Messianic teaching of the Old Testament something far more spiritual and less political than the people of his time had seen. The Jews of his day interpreted their Messianic hope in terms of earthly power and government; Jesus interpreted it in terms of righteousness and service. There was the whole fundamental distinction; and to make that distinction clear to his Jewish-Christian readers was the first great purpose of this writer. If he could convince them once for all that the title "Messiah"[1] stands for leadership in *character*, rather than Jewish leadership in world politics, they would then perceive how the true Messianic cause could survive, even though the Jewish nation perished.

12. **How did Christ "fulfill prophecy"?** What has just been said about the loose method of using the Old Testament that prevailed in Matthew's time raises a question

[1] "Messiah" is the Hebrew word which becomes "Christ" in the Greek of the New Testament. Both words mean literally "Anointed," referring to the idea that the Messiah comes with a special divine authority.

that should be faced by the modern student. If we can no longer use Matthew's " proofs " that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, then what is the true relation between Jesus and the Old Testament hopes and descriptions of the Messiah and his kingdom? In other words, how does Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecy?

To understand the answer to this question, it is necessary to break away completely from the idea which has so often been taught, that the fulfillment of prophecy consists in matching some deed or circumstance in the life of Jesus with some word or phrase selected more or less at random from the Old Testament. That was just the point where the Jews of Matthew's time were at fault in their understanding of prophecy. They were satisfied to find superficial resemblances between Jesus and their prophecies. They should have gotten deeper into the heart of their sacred writings, and then they would have found a resemblance, i.e., a fulfillment, far more wonderful than the chance coincidences which they so eagerly seized upon. That was what Jesus himself did. He believed that he was the Messiah. He believed that he was fulfilling prophecy. " I came not to destroy, but to fulfill " (Matt. 5 : 17). But how? By discovering the deep purpose of God for

men as it was revealed in the Scriptures of his race, and then accepting that purpose as his Father's will for him, and living it faithfully and conscientiously. It did not matter to Jesus whether he was buried in a rich man's tomb or in the tomb of a poor man. That was not the way he believed he was fulfilling the great poetic prophecy of Isaiah 53 (cf. verse 9). He fulfilled it by perceiving deeply the meaning of the whole poem in which that line occurs, realizing that here was a poetic portrait of a life in which God was well pleased, a life of righteousness and sacrificial service; and then setting himself earnestly to live just that kind of a life of righteousness and sacrificial service. And because he so lived, the spirit of his life ran true to the spirit of the ancient writing and the " Messianic prophecy " found in him its true and perfect fulfillment, or embodiment. That was ever Jesus' relation to the Old Testament. He found in its noblest passages ideals and inspirations which he made his own; he lived them out as no other man had ever done; and thus in him they were fulfilled.

13. **The kingdom of God.** Matthew's Gospel re-interprets the idea of the kingdom of God to its Jewish-Christian readers along the same lines that it develops the idea of Jesus' Messiahship. It shows that the king-

dom, too, is indeed the same kingdom that the whole history of the Hebrews had been preparing for, and yet is radically different from the current ideas about it. In other words, the Jews of the first century had a wrong idea about the kingdom of God, just as they had misunderstood the idea of the Messiah, and it is the business of this Gospel to correct that false view.

The kingdom is the one great theme of Matthew's Gospel. The word itself occurs no less than fifty times. Matthew's favorite description of it is the " kingdom of heaven," (32 times), rather than " kingdom of God " (4 times). This preference is in itself significant, for the phrase " kingdom of heaven " suggests that the nature of the kingdom is super-earthly; it is a heavenly or spiritual order brought into the affairs of earth. Thus it turns one's thoughts away from political to moral and spiritual facts.

The keynote of the Gospel is struck in the first words which Jesus spoke when he began his ministry in Galilee, " Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4 : 17). The whole Gospel is an unfolding of that statement. (1) The kingdom, concerning which all the ancient seers and psalmists had sung, toward which all the Divine education of the Hebrew race had been directed,

was now about to be set up; (2) but this kingdom was not primarily political, but moral and spiritual; a kingdom of righteousness, at the gateway of which stood the flaming word, " Repent! "

Thus the Gospel answered the perplexed inquiry of the Jewish Christians whose faith had been so sorely tried by the political ruin of their nation. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom of character conformed to the righteous will of God. Such a kingdom is not necessarily dependent upon the continuance of the Jewish nation. And thus we see at the same time the permanent message of this Gospel. It is the announcement and interpretation of the kingship, or government, of God over the lives of men. To realize and spread this government is the supreme business of the followers of Jesus Christ.

14. **The universality of the Christian religion.** In an earlier chapter we have seen how Paul performed the great service of planting the faith of Christ firmly and widely in the Gentile world, so that when the tragic breakdown of the Jewish nation came at last, the cause for which Christ lived and died did not perish with his nation. That was what Christ was so urgently desiring when he said, in connection with his teaching about the

coming overthrow of the temple, "And the gospel *must* first be preached unto all the nations (Gentiles)!" (Mark 13 : 10) The Gentile churches were thoroughly detached from Judaism; they did not feel that their existence was dependent upon the national fortunes of the Jews; but not so the remaining groups of Jewish Christians who survived the great catastrophe. It was very hard for them, with their intense religious patriotism, to realize that the Messianic cause, i.e., the faith of Jesus Christ (Christianity) was vastly bigger and deeper than the national life of their own race. The writer therefore seeks to show them, not only that Jesus' Messiahship and the kingdom of God were much greater and more universal conceptions than they had supposed, but that Jesus did actually try his best to establish his kingdom among his own people first, confining his ministry to his own land (4 : 23), and restricting the labors of his fellow-workers to their own countrymen (10 : 5–6). Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus would really have made his own nation the first Christian nation, and the first missionaries of the kingdom to other nations. But Israel would not have it so. Because he demanded repentance and righteousness as the prime conditions of the kingdom, the rulers of Israel

opposed him, and at last flatly rejected the kingdom he brought them. Thus he was forced to declare to them, " The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof " (21 : 43). And then he warned them that their unrighteous and unteachable attitude would soon result in arousing the fury of the Roman authorities against them, and that would mean the utter annihilation of their nation. Thus Matthew makes it clear that it was the Jews themselves who were responsible for the fact that God had set aside their nation, and had turned to a different plan for establishing his righteous government in the earth.

Here, too, we see the deeper, permanent value of this Gospel. It teaches us that the whole purpose of God in establishing a kingdom is not confined to any one nation, be it Israel, America, or any other. He calls each nation, as he called Israel of old, to follow Jesus Christ, in order to be the servants and messengers of his kingdom-gospel to the other nations of the world. If America fails to enter the kingdom by the way of repentance and righteousness, then she will fail, as Israel failed, and the kingdom will be " taken away from her, and given to another nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

For Christianity, according to Matthew, is for the world, not for the private possession or enjoyment of any select group. The greatest practical teaching of this "Gospel of the kingdom" is the suggestion that we gather from its whole treatment of the career of Jesus Christ, namely, that each Christian individual or Christian nation is to be a center of influence, a point of radiation, from which the kingdom of righteousness is to spread outward, until all men and all nations are gathered in glad and voluntary submission to the will of God.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

GOODSPEED, *Story of the New Testament*, ch. IX.
BURTON, *Short Introduction to the Gospels*, ch. I.
BACON, *Making of the New Testament*, ch. VI.
VON SODEN, *History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 127–153, 181–200.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Read the Gospel of Matthew through, if possible at one sitting, following the Outline on page 46. Note the passages in which Christ's mission has a special and explicit reference to the Jews; to the Gentiles. What is the relation between these two aspects of his mission, as reflected in this Gospel?

2. Compare the Outline of Matthew (page 46) with the Outline of Mark (page 21). What general points of similarity do you find?

3. Be sure to read Matthew's eleven quotations from the Old Testament (listed on page 52, note), and compare them carefully with their Old Testament originals, so as to verify the statements made in this chapter regarding Matthew's method of using Old Testament prophecy.

4. Make a list of the longer discourses of Jesus in Matthew. Which of these are omitted in Mark? In general, how does Mark's report of the discourses which he does give compare with Matthew's?

5. Why was Matthew placed first in our New Testament, instead of Mark?

OUTLINE OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

I Preface; Birth and Youth of John the Baptist and Jesus, chs. 1–2.

II Preparation for Jesus' Public Career, 3 : 1 — 4 : 13.

Similar to Matthew, with additional teachings of John the Baptist and a different genealogy.

III The Galilean Ministry, 4 : 14 — 9 : 17.

The principal additions to the material found in Mark and Matthew are the raising of the widow's son, 7 : 11–17, and the anointing in the house of Simon, 7 : 36–50. Each section should be compared, as to contents, with the corresponding sections of the Outlines of Mark and Matthew, pages 21 *and* 46.

1 Jesus' Rise to Fame, 4 : 14 — 5 : 16.
2 The Growth of Opposition, 5 : 17 — 6 : 11.
3 The Sermon on the Mount, 6 : 12–49.
4 A Group of Miracles, 7 : 1–17.
5 Results: Unresponsiveness and Appreciation, 7 : 18–50.

6 Teaching by Parables, 8 : 1–21.
7 Another Group of Miracles, 8 : 22–56.
8 Climax of Jesus' Fame, 9 : 1–17.

IV Journeys in the North, 9 : 18–50.
Follows Mark, but is much condensed.
1 The Crisis at Caesarea Philippi, 9 : 18–43a.
2 Teaching about Greatness, 9 : 43b–50.

V The Last Journey to Jerusalem, 9 : 51 — 19 : 28.
The larger portion of this section is peculiar to Luke. Only a small portion is found in Mark. The verses not peculiar to Luke are from widely scattered sections of Matthew and Mark.

VI The Messianic Announcement, 19 : 29–48.
The stories of the entrance into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple are quite different from the stories in Mark and Matthew.

VII Conflict with the Jewish Leaders, ch. 20.
Follows Mark.

VIII Forecast of the Overthrow of the Temple, ch. 21.
Follows Mark, with some additional verses at the close.

IX The Death of Jesus, chs. 22–23.
Follows Mark, with many minor changes, and with the addition of the incidents of the examination before Herod, the lament of the daughters of Jerusalem, and the penitent thief.

X The Resurrection and Ascension, ch. 24.
The section on the discovery of the empty tomb is based on Mark; otherwise the story is quite different, though some of the incidents are longer accounts of incidents referred to in Mark.

LUKE, AND THE LOST GOSPELS

CHAPTER IV

Luke, and the Lost Gospels

1. **The preface of Luke's Gospel.** The best introduction to this Gospel is Luke's own introduction, in the first four verses of chapter 1:

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

A careful study of these verses reveals several important facts regarding this Gospel. (1) The Greek text of these verses, and of the Gospel that follows, is much purer and more classical in style than the Greek of the other Gospels. The writer must have been a man of considerable culture, well-versed in literary Greek. (2) The reference to "many" other narratives shows that Matthew and

Mark were not the only ones who tried to write stories of Jesus' life before this time. None of these other attempts, however, has been preserved; they are "lost Gospels." (3) The address to Theophilus suggests that the Gospel is written to a personal friend of the writer, although it is doubtless intended also for wider circulation among Theophilus' Christian friends. The name "Theophilus" is Greek, so we may infer that the writer has Greek readers in mind. (4) Theophilus had already been "instructed" in the current stories about Jesus, but his friend, who had read these stories, and who was something of a critic himself, seemed to think that some of them at least were wanting in accuracy, either as to their statements of fact, or as to the general impression of Jesus Christ which they conveyed to their readers. He therefore set out to gather the best information he could find, not only from these written stories, but also from such surviving "eye-witnesses" as he could get in touch with; and then he attempted to write a narrative of Christ's life which would give Theophilus and his friends a greater "certainty" concerning these matters.

Each of these suggestions gathered from the preface is confirmed and extended by further study of the Gospel itself.

2. **The author.** There is no good reason for doubting the uniform tradition of the early church, that the author of this Gospel was Luke, who is mentioned several times in Paul's epistles, and who was also the author of the book of Acts. Luke's references to Jewish localities and customs, both in his Gospel and in Acts, indicate that he was quite familiar with Palestine and the religion of Judaism. But Paul's reference to him in Colossians 4 : 14, when compared with verse 11 of the same chapter, seems to mean that he was not of the "circumcision," that is, he was not a Jew by birth. It seems probable that Luke was a Greek, but that before he had become a Christian he had been a convert to the Jewish faith. Such converts were commonly called "Hellenists." His clear, classical style confirms this suggestion that he was a Greek by birth and education.

Luke is commonly known to us as the friend of Paul. Paul refers to him as "Luke the physician," and scholars have often pointed out a number of technical medical terms in his Gospel and Acts, which confirm this statement. He was probably Paul's physician during the years of the apostle's imprisonment in Rome, caring for him during the last years of his life with such skill as the meager medical science of those days afforded.

The personal character of Luke is reflected in his writings. With the Gospel before us, it is not hard to see what kind of a man this bosom friend of Paul's was. His literary ability, including both his fine style and his researches into the literature of his times, marks him as a man of considerable learning and culture. His selection of incidents and sayings from among the stories current about Jesus reveals him as a man of fine human sympathies; tender toward womanhood, large and generous in his spirit toward all who were down-trodden, rejoicing in the freedom and breadth of the mercy of God that was made known to mankind through the words and deeds of Jesus Christ.

3. **The sources.** Like Matthew, Luke's Gospel seems to have been written, as the preface suggests, by piecing together extracts from other earlier writings, with such rearrangements and corrections as Luke himself thought necessary to give a more orderly account of Jesus' career. A careful study of the Gospel shows that four main sources were used quite extensively in it.

(1) The general framework of the story is the same as that of Mark. If the Gospel is compared with Mark, we shall find just what we found in the case of Matthew, namely, that Luke has given us substantially a repro-

duction of Mark, adopting Mark's general plan, and copying large portions of Mark almost verbatim, while into this framework he has inserted materials gathered from other sources.

(2) Just as Matthew's Gospel weaves into Mark's story of Jesus long extracts from the book known as the *Logia*, or "Sayings of Jesus," so Luke has inserted into his story many quotations from this same source. If the quotations from the *Logia* in Matthew and Luke are compared, it will be found that each writer has felt free to make slight changes in the wording, altering a word or a phrase here and there, in order to express himself more perfectly in his own style, and to present his subject from his own point of view.

(3) If this were all, Luke's Gospel would be almost exactly like Matthew's Gospel. But Luke has also inserted a long account of a certain portion of Jesus' ministry which is entirely omitted by Matthew and Mark. This is the section which includes most of the material from 9 : 51 to 18 : 14. It is evident that for this part of the story Luke is depending upon another of the "many" narratives which were current. Scholars usually call this source the "Perean Document," because it deals with a portion of Jesus' ministry which

was carried on chiefly in Perea, east of the Jordan, during his last journey to Jerusalem. This Perean Document contains some of the most priceless parables of Jesus, such as the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. No trace of this document has ever been found, beyond the quotations which we have in Luke. It is one of the "Lost Gospels."

(4) Besides these three main sources, Luke begins his Gospel with two chapters of stories connected with the birth and infancy of Jesus, which are not found in any other Gospel, and which he probably gathered from still other writings that were known to him, but which have been lost to us.

4. **Luke's portrait of Jesus.** The address to Theophilus indicates, as we have seen, that Luke expected his Gospel to be read chiefly by Greek, rather than by Jewish or Roman, Christians. There are many details in the Gospel itself which confirm this suggestion, such as the rarity of quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, occasional explanations of the author's references to localities in Palestine, and the absence of certain Hebrew words which occur frequently in the other Gospels.

We discover the key to Luke's portrayal of the character of Jesus when we remember

this fact—that the Gospel was intended primarily for Greek readers. The great ideal that Greek culture had always stood for was the ideal of the perfect man. The outstanding contribution of Greece to the world's civilization was not in any special national greatness, but in the greatness of certain individual men who grew up in her midst; men like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for example. The sum of all Greek philosophy was represented by the saying, "Man, know thyself." The achievement of perfect manhood was the highest aspiration of the best culture of Greece.

Now, it has often been pointed out that Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as the perfect man, the pattern of God's ideal for humanity. It is not so much the Messiahship of Jesus that we find emphasized here (compare Matthew), as the humanity, the manhood, of Jesus. This portrait of Jesus as the world's most perfect man will be appreciated best when we set it in contrast with the Greek ideal of perfection, as Luke doubtless expected his readers to do. To present in Jesus a new and better type of perfection than the Grecian model is the underlying motive of this Gospel.

So, while Luke pictures the physical perfection of Jesus in the stories of his birth and childhood, his mental perfection in the period

of youth, and his spiritual perfection in the testing experiences of baptism and temptation, he goes right on presenting this perfect man in action, showing his perfection in his deeds and words, until he comes to the story of the transfiguration (9 : 28ff). This experience of Jesus means, for Luke, that Jesus has reached the highest level of perfection that is possible for a human individual; he is now ready to be " translated " into glory, without the intervening experience of death, just as Enoch and Elijah had been; for he is worthy. But at this point Luke makes his great contribution to the portrait of the perfect man. He shows that although Jesus possessed every quality of perfection that could enter into the Greek ideal, there was something in him that went beyond anything that Greece included in her philosophy, namely, the sacrifice of himself upon the altar of service to God and humanity. The Greek ideal man was self-centered. That, according to Luke, was where it failed. Jesus went beyond anything that Greek culture or thought had achieved, when he came down from the mount of transfiguration, and " set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem," to suffer and die for others. That note of sacrifice is the crowning glory of perfection which Luke discovers in the Son of man. The key verse of Luke's Gospel is,

therefore, in 19 : 10: " For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

5. Luke's purpose in his Gospel. Matthew's Gospel is strongly argumentative; he tries to present, quite formally and technically, proofs that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the Jewish prophets. Mark's Gospel is primarily historical; it presents a simple, vivid narrative of the deeds and movements of Jesus, as Mark had learned them from Peter. John's Gospel, as we shall see, is strongly theological; it aims to present a theory, or doctrine, about the Person of Christ. Luke's Gospel, while partaking somewhat of the aims of the first two (but not the last), is mainly didactic; it is written primarily for the purpose of correcting and building up the Christian faith of Theophilus and his friends.

To be sure, there is a real attempt in Luke to present an accurate historical narrative of the career of Jesus. But it must be remembered that the writers and readers of the first century were not accustomed to make the same sharp distinction between history as a *record* of fact and history as an *interpretation* of fact that we in our more scientific age insist on. We must not ask from Luke's " history " the same literal fidelity to minute

details of fact that we would ask from a modern historian. There is, also, a certain argumentative strain in his Gospel; not formal and obvious, as in Matthew; but present nevertheless. Luke is trying to *convince* his readers that here is the world's perfect man. He does not seek to do this by means of formal proofs, but rather by means of such literary and artistic skill that his character-sketch of Jesus will make its own convincing appeal to his readers. But beyond either of these aims, Luke is concerned chiefly to present the career of Jesus in a manner that will show Theophilus that the invisible Christ whom Christians worshipped had revealed in his earthly life the true pattern of holy living, and that to live by this pattern is to grow stronger and stronger in the Christian life.

6. **The Saviourhood of Jesus.** (1) Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as the brother and the friend of man. The public ministry opens with the declaration of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, that he had come to "preach good tidings to the poor" (4 : 18). One is impressed as he reads on with the compassion of Jesus toward the weaker and despised classes of society. His friendship for sinners is so marked as to draw the criticism of the haughty Pharisees (15 : 1–2). He reserves his denunciations for the hypocritical

officials (11 : 37–52), and has only pity and forgiveness for penitent sinners (7 : 37–50; 18 : 9–14; 23 : 39–43). He mingles socially with the obnoxious publicans (19 : 5), and shows especial sympathy toward the " poor " (6 : 20; 18 : 22–24). He loves children, and defends them (18 : 15–17). His sympathy and friendship toward women (who were generally looked down upon) is more marked in Luke than in any other Gospel (4 : 38–39; 7 : 11–15; 7 : 36–50; 8 : 2–3; 10 : 38–42; 21 : 1–4; 23 : 27–29).

(2) The universality of Christ's Saviourhood is also especially marked in Luke. He is the Saviour of the whole world. He declares that his mission is to seek and save the " lost " — not merely the " lost sheep of the house of Israel " (as in Matthew 10 : 5). The angels at Bethlehem proclaim that the birth of the Saviour is a cause of joy to " all the people " (2 : 10–11). The aged Simeon, prophesying in the temple as he holds the infant Jesus in his arms, declares that God has sent this child to be a " revelation to the Gentiles " (2 : 32). John the Baptist, in announcing the kingdom of God, is careful to add the words not reported in the other Gospels, " And all flesh shall see the salvation of God " (3 : 6). And after the story of this Christ has been told, and we have seen him

bringing his helpful ministry to all sorts and conditions of men, we find him at last gathering his disciples about him and commissioning them to be his witnesses, to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name "unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem," (24 : 47).

7. **The Christian way of life.** The Christian way of life is commended in Luke both by the example and by the direct teaching of Christ.

(1) Christ himself, as Luke presents him, is the perfect man, the model of the true life. To catch his spirit, to live as he lived, not in the external movements and arrangements of life, but in inward disposition and motive, is to be a Christian. But the whole aim of this Gospel is to show that the character of Christ is just manhood at its best; manhood living in dependence upon and obedience to the will of God, and therefore realizing to the full the highest capacities of human nature. The most perfect Christian, therefore, according to Luke, is just the most perfect man. The Christian life is not some new manner of living that one takes on, that is strange and foreign to one's natural capacities. It is the life that recognizes every instinct and capacity of man's nature as sacred and God-given, and seeks not to suppress any of them, but

to control all of them, so that one's whole nature may express itself joyously and helpfully. There is no place for asceticism, or self-denial for its own sake, in the example set by Luke's Christ. Every instinct for joy and social pleasure is divine, and one lives less than a real Christian life when one tries to suppress the instinctive urge of happiness that is part of one's deepest self.

(2) At the same time, Christ, in his direct teaching about the way of life, realizes how prone we are to exalt the less important things of life at the expense of the more important. Therefore his teaching in this Gospel is particularly insistent upon a stern self-discipline, in order that the material interests of life shall not crowd out the higher spiritual interests. It is in this Gospel that Christ is most severe in setting forth the terms of discipleship. "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. . . . So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (14 : 26, 27, 33). The motive of these stern words is not that life may be restricted and

made miserable by its renunciations. The motive is really just the opposite of this. It is because Christ desires that his followers shall enter into the largest possible enjoyment of life that he insists that no object of affection or service shall share the supreme loyalty that he claims for himself. Nothing less than such undivided allegiance can enable the Christian to escape the domination of life by the lesser good, and to achieve the good that is really highest and broadest and happiest.

8. **The Gospel.** When we speak of the Christian "gospel" we mean the message of Christianity that God is good, that he loves men, and seeks at measureless cost to himself to redeem them from their failures and sins, and to help them live lives worthy of his children. The gospel is therefore primarily the "good news" about God. When we review the teaching of Luke about God, we find that he lays special stress on (1) God's fatherly love and boundless kindness, and (2) the fact that God's requirements are moral rather than ceremonial.

(1) The threefold parable of the lost things — the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son — is found only in Luke (chapter 15). It is the most perfect story in the world for illustrating all that is essential in the Christian

religion. And the outstanding truth suggested by the story is the truth of God's interest in seeking and finding his lost children. No more perfect picture of God has ever been drawn, even by Jesus Christ himself, than the portrait of the father of the lost boy, eager for his son to return, welcoming his home-coming with rejoicing, and restoring to him his position in the family as his own son. This picture of God is supplemented by many other teachings in this Gospel which reveal God's fatherly interest in his children. Thus, Jesus teaches that God anticipates his children's needs (12 : 30); he is concerned about the small details of their lives (12 : 7); he responds quickly to their cry for help (11 : 5–13); he is kind even toward the unthankful and the evil, and merciful even toward the sinful (6 : 35); he forgives the forgiving (11 : 4) and justifies the penitent (18 : 14).

(2) The Jews had allowed their religion to become a formal and exacting code of ceremonial requirements. To be a good Jew, according to the teaching of the Pharisees in the time of Christ, one did not necessarily have to be a good man morally; but one must be very scrupulous about the precise manner of observing the Sabbath, and about the endless details of religious exercises. The Pharisees

could not eat with unwashed hands, yet they were willing to appear before God with filthy hearts. Jesus swept away completely all this empty and corrupt view of religion. He taught that God's measurements of the religious life are moral, not ceremonial. Justice and love are worth more than the tithing of herbs (11 : 42); clean hands are not so important as clean hearts (11 : 39); doing good is the best way to observe the Sabbath (6 : 9; 13 : 10–17).

9. **The kingdom of God.** Matthew, as we have seen, presents the subject of the kingdom of God from the standpoint of the Jewish national hopes; the kingdom is not political, but moral, and is therefore not bound up with the political fortunes of the Jews. Luke also shows a deep interest in Christ's teaching about the kingdom, but presents it in such a way as to emphasize some aspects of it with which Matthew does not deal so directly.

(1) The most important saying of Jesus concerning the kingdom which is found only in Luke is in chapter 17 : 20–21. The Pharisees asked him when the kingdom was to appear, and he replied, " The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is among you." The Pharisees were looking for the establishment of the kingdom

at some future time; Jesus declares that the kingdom is already in their midst. In this statement he seems to be referring to the works of mercy that he had been performing; the sick were being healed, the lepers were being cleansed, penitents were being forgiven, the poor were hearing the good news about God. " The kingdom," he is saying in effect, " is a movement in history which has already begun through my ministry; it is marked by such deeds as I am doing. Wherever men in my name and inspired by my spirit go out and strive to lift the world toward God and righteousness and happiness, there the kingdom of God is present and at work."

(2) The passage just quoted thus presents the kingdom of God as the spirit of love at work righting the wrongs of the world. This conception of love as the solution of social problems is characteristic of Luke's Gospel. The outstanding illustration of it, of course, is the story of the Good Samaritan (10 : 30–37), which, like the story of the Lost Son, is found only in Luke. The same truth is also at the bottom of many teachings of Jesus about wealth, which Luke reports with unusual fullness. The rich man who built more barns (12 : 15–21) did not need more barns so much as he needed more love. The true use of wealth is to serve those who lack

(18 : 22). The peril of wealth is very great (18 : 24), for it is impossible for a man to serve God and the spirit of money-getting at the same time (16 : 13); yet it is possible for a rich man to use his wealth so as to promote eternal friendships (16 : 9). Jesus also took occasion, when invited to a feast (14 : 1–11), to point out that even social festivities may be, and ought to be, occasions for truly humble service to society.

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VON SODEN, *History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 165–180.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Read the Gospel of Luke through, if possible at one sitting, following the Outline on page 70. Compare the Outline with those of Mark and Matthew (pages 21 and 46). What general resemblances do you find between Luke and these earlier Gospels? What broad differences?

2. Compare the preface of Luke (1 : 1–4) with the preface of Acts (Acts 1 : 1). What does the comparison suggest as to (1) authorship, (2) readers, (3) purpose, of each book; and (4) the relation of the two books to one another?

3. Note that Luke places the rejection at Nazareth (4 : 16–30) at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Where does Mark place it? (Mark 6 : 1–6) Does Luke really mean to suggest that this was Jesus' first public act? (compare verse 23). What is his motive in putting the incident at this point?

4. In the section, 9 : 51 to 19 : 28, what especially famous stories do you find, that do not occur in the other Gospels? Think what the world would have lost, had not Luke preserved these fragments of the "Perean Document."

5. Note that Luke makes Jerusalem the scene of the resurrection appearances of Jesus (ch. 24). What does he seem to think of the idea (of Mark) that the appearances were to take place in Galilee? (compare carefully Luke 24 : 6 with Mark 16 : 7, and note also that Mark 14 : 28 is deliberately omitted by Luke).

6. Renan called this Gospel "the most beautiful book in the world." What characteristics do you note in it that tend to justify this description?

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS

CHAPTER V

The Historical Value of the First Three Gospels

1. **The original language of the Gospels.** The common language of the Jews in Palestine in the time of Jesus and his apostles was *Aramaic*. This was originally the language of Syria, and came into use among the Hebrews gradually, from the days of the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) onward. It is closely related to the Hebrew tongue, yet different in many respects. The pure, classical Hebrew was preserved in the writings of the Old Testament, which are almost wholly in that language.

But except among the Jews, the common language of the Roman Empire in these times was Greek. Some of the Roman officials, naturally, used the Latin tongue, especially for official business. But in the vast provincial territory of the Roman Empire, Greek was the common language of business and literature. Doubtless many of the Jews in Palestine were as familiar with Greek as they were with their own Aramaic. It is not known

whether Jesus knew or used the Greek language; it is possible that he knew it well enough to use the Greek translation of the Old Testament that had been made at least a hundred years before his birth and was in common use in his time. But there is no certain evidence on this point. His public teachings and his private conversations with his disciples were all in the familiar Aramaic tongue.

Among his apostles, however, were some who understood Greek and used it freely. All four of our Gospels were originally written in the Greek tongue.

2. **The human origin of the Gospels.** The Gospels were written, just as any other book, ancient or modern, is written, by men. It is neither natural nor necessary to suppose that they were produced by any miraculous agency. Each Gospel has come to us in its present form through the thought and labour of one or more human individuals, and each bears unmistakably the marks of its human writer. The personalities of Mark, of John, of Luke and Matthew, are just as clearly reflected in the way they have selected and arranged their materials, in their choice of words, their literary style, as the personalities of Milton or Browning or Roosevelt are reflected in the books they have written.

No study of the Gospels can be worthy of the serious student that fails to recognize this fact. We must always remember that what we have in the Gospels is not alone a *record* of things that Jesus said and did, but an *interpretation* of these things, an estimate of their spiritual value, by their respective writers. Even if we regard the true sayings of Jesus as absolutely infallible, we have to take into account that they have been preserved for us through the medium of very human writers, who have reported him from the standpoint of what he had come to mean to them.

3. **The modern prejudice against miracles.** There is a strong tendency today to discount any story which professes to be historical, but which contains " miraculous " features. Since the miraculous element enters very largely into the Gospel stories of Jesus Christ, the modern student cannot help recognizing that prejudice, and he must take it into account in his estimate of the historical value of the Gospels.

If " miraculous " is taken in the sense of some activity of God which sets aside and defies the operation of his own laws of nature, the prejudice against miracles is pretty well justified by the whole trend of modern science, with its fine appreciation of the reign of law

everywhere in the universe. But if the Gospel miracles are to be understood, not as violations of the order of nature, but as the operation of natural laws which men had not then come to understand, but which Christ because of his unique personality was able to employ, then they cannot be disposed of so easily, and we may not feel free to throw doubt upon the Gospel story just because there are miracles in it.

4. **The notion of "wrong in one place, untrustworthy everywhere."** Another common prejudice against the Gospel history has grown up out of the idea that God is the author of the Gospels, and that he, and not their human writers, is alone responsible for the perfect accuracy of every statement contained in them. This is a very misleading idea, because it leads us at once into serious errors in our attitude toward the Gospels, while at the same time it contains just enough of truth to make it sound very plausible.

The truth in the idea is that through these Gospel writers God, in his providential government of the world, was really trying to get the facts and the significance of the life of Jesus permanently into the mind of the human race, so that the truth about Jesus might be known, and his influence might be

at work, forever. God did cause the Gospels to be written. But the serious mistake in the idea is that God caused the life of Jesus to be made into a permanent literary record *independently of men.* The whole teaching of the Bible, and of Christ himself, is that God works for the advancement of the human race *through men;* he uses men to accomplish his purposes, uses them with all their talents and limitations and failings, and is content not to move forward faster than frail and fallible men can keep up with him. It is thoroughly misleading, therefore, to say that God, rather than certain very human individuals, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, was the " author " of our Gospels, and is consequently alone responsible for whatever is said in them.

Each Gospel story must be judged on its own merits. It is quite possible, for example, that Matthew reported the Sermon on the Mount correctly, and yet was mistaken when he said that there were two Gadarene demoniacs instead of one, as Mark reports. It is quite possible that John's portrait of Christ may be true to the best faith of Christianity, and yet he may be historically mistaken in placing the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry instead of at the close, as the other Gospels do. To find an

error in one detail does not mean that the whole Gospel history is untrustworthy.

5. **The value of the Gospel history.** From all that has been said above, it will be evident that we cannot take the absolute historical accuracy of the Gospel narratives for granted. The question of trustworthiness cannot be answered except on the basis of painstaking and expert historical study of the Gospels themselves. There are many points of detail in this field that only well-trained historical experts are qualified to express an independent opinion about. But it is possible for the ordinary student to see for himself, and to appreciate, the main lines of the answer that modern scholarship can give to the general question.

There are certain factors to be noted, which tended to interfere with the strict accuracy of the Gospel story. (1) Our present English Gospels are translations made from the Greek Gospels; the Greek manuscripts from which they are made are not the original writings, but copies of them made by scribes or teachers in the fourth century of our era, or later. The original Greek Gospels, moreover, do not report the exact words of Jesus, but have translated them from Aramaic into Greek. All this process of translation and copying offers opportunities for mistakes to creep in.

(2) Each Gospel writer has given us his story of Jesus from his own personal point of view; his interpretation of Jesus may not have been perfect, and his partial or imperfect views of Christ may have prejudiced him and led him unconsciously into mistakes of fact or interpretation. (3) There is clear evidence in all the Gospels that their writers were not so much concerned with writing an accurate biography of Jesus, down to the last detail, as with giving an impressionistic picture of the life and significance of Jesus for the Christian religion; if they made relatively slight historical mistakes, they themselves would have said that such mistakes did not matter, so long as they succeeded in making their readers think of Christ as they thought of him. (4) We have noted in the first chapter that more than forty years elapsed between the career of Jesus and the writing of our Gospels. During that time men can forget many details, and when they try to recall them they are quite apt to get some of their facts twisted, even if they are correct in the main. (5) It is always true that when men fondly remember a great man, their memories naturally begin to exaggerate their favorite recollections, or, to express it more accurately, to *idealize* their hero. It is this inevitable tendency that accounts for the

legends and miracles that have grown up around the names of great men, such as St. Francis d'Assisi. There is no good reason to suppose that this tendency would fail to show itself as men tried to remember Jesus Christ.

All these factors tended to break down the strict accuracy of the Gospel records, and they must be taken into account, and the proper allowance made for them, when the modern student tries to gather from the Gospels the history of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, there are certain factors which tended to keep the recollections of Jesus free from mistakes during the forty years or more that elapsed before they were written down. (1) The Gospels were written in an age when writing was much less common than it is now, and people depended upon their memories just so much the more. It is little short of marvelous to modern students when they learn what prodigious feats of memory were common among these ancient peoples. Yet the great books of antiquity, like Homer's Iliad or the books of the Hebrew lawgivers, were invariably known and passed on for generations by memory before they were first put into writing. Where we would make a hundred slips of memory in reciting a hundred pages of poetry or narrative, Mark

or Peter or others who taught the stories of Christ to the early Christian converts would be apt to make but half a dozen. This wonderful cultivation of memory must be taken into account as a great help in preserving the Gospel stories with essential accuracy. (2) We cannot overlook the fact that the Christian faith itself tended to emphasize the importance of accuracy in speech, and to make the Gospel teachers and writers feel that it was important to verify their statements as far as possible before making them. (3) Our Gospels were written either by those who were personal eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus, or were the direct pupils of such eye-witnesses.

6. **The historical value of Mark.** Mark, as we have seen, probably knew Jesus personally, saw him, and followed him, especially during the Master's visits to Jerusalem. Moreover, he lived among the earliest Christians, who probably had their headquarters in his home. And his Gospel itself is, according to the testimony of the early Church Fathers, largely the teaching of Peter, which Mark, as his secretary, wrote down for him. Thus we have good reason for trusting the Gospel of Mark as substantially a true story of the career of Jesus.

There is only one clear indication in Mark's

Gospel that he has deliberately told his story out of its true chronological order. That is the section from chapter 2: 1 to 3: 6. In this section it seems clear that Mark has grouped together five incidents, not because they all happened in close sequence at just this point in Jesus' ministry, but because they furnish a cumulative picture of the opposition to Jesus from the Pharisees. The point in each of these five stories is the criticism directed against Jesus by the Pharisees, and his self-defense. The series is progressive, coming to its climax when the Pharisees "went out; and straightway with the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him" (3: 6).

7. **The historical value of Matthew.** In Matthew we find a much stronger argumentative interest than in Mark. Matthew is trying to prove a case for Jesus before his Jewish-Christian readers who were puzzled about the relation of Jesus to the popular Jewish hopes of Messiah and his kingdom. Therefore he shows little regard for strict chronological order. His material is gathered under the general framework of Mark's Gospel, and is therefore naturally chronological in the main. Yet he has obviously collected his material into groups, each of which deals with some topic or phase of Jesus' life.

We need not suppose that all the miracles in chapters 8–9 occurred in just the order given; or that all the parables of the kingdom in chapter 13 were spoken on one single occasion; or that all the teachings about the work of spreading the gospel, which we find in chapter 10, were originally spoken as part of the instructions to the disciples for their first tour of Galilee.

Matthew, as we have seen, is composed chiefly by weaving together the stories of Mark, and the teachings of Jesus that had been gathered into an earlier publication now called the *Logia*. There is some reason to suppose that this book, the *Logia*, was originally arranged by topics, rather than by dates, so that the great teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom would be gathered together in one section, his teachings about the mission of his disciples in another section, and so on. If this is true, we see clearly how it happens that so much of this Gospel is arranged in groups of incidents or teachings of Jesus.

8. **The historical value of Luke.** Luke declares in his preface (1 : 1–4) that he intends to write a better Gospel than those which were then current, that is, a Gospel which would be more valuable for the instruction of his friend Theophilus; one which

would create in his friend's mind a feeling of greater certainty concerning the Christian truths which he had been taught. From our survey of this Gospel we have seen that it consists in the main of an interweaving of Mark and the *Logia*, just as Matthew does, but with the addition of a long account of the activities of Jesus in the region of Perea. Luke evidently felt that such a combination of records would present a fuller, clearer portrait of Christ than any other Gospel that he knew; moreover, when he is relating something which we also find in Matthew or Mark, and changes the wording or arrangement that he finds there, we may suppose that he believes that his changes are going to give a fairer impression of Jesus to his readers; that his version will be less liable to be misunderstood, and so will give a greater sense of certainty to his reader's faith in the Saviour.

9. **A summarized statement of the trustworthiness of the first three Gospels.** We may now gather up the main conclusions regarding the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels, in which the great majority of modern scholars are pretty well agreed. Leaving until the next chapter the special question of John's Gospel, we may state these conclusions regarding Matthew, Mark and Luke as follows:

(1) The general plan of Jesus' career is based on Mark, the other two being but copies of Mark in this respect. The plan of Jesus' life as presented by Mark is thoroughly trustworthy for what is given. But we must not forget that what we have in our Gospels is, after all, only a small fragment of the total life of Jesus, — just a few of the best remembered words and deeds and movements. We can trust Mark, however, as to the general progress of Jesus' public career.

(2) As to the chronological order of the separate deeds and teachings of Jesus, Mark's order is usually to be preferred, when the various Gospels do not agree. And where Mark is silent, or not decisive, Luke is probably more likely to be correct than Matthew, for he wrote with greater interest in just these points, and less interest in trying to mass materials for arguing a case for Jesus' Messiahship.

(3) As to the separate events or sayings, each story must be estimated on its own merits. It is well within the scientific truth to say that most of the events and sayings reported in the first three Gospels occurred substantially as they have been recorded. The presence of a miraculous element in a story may raise special questions that need

to be faced, but does not necessarily make the record untrustworthy. Yet, on the other hand, there might be special reasons for doubting whether a certain story is really historical, and such doubt concerning one story does not necessarily throw doubt upon the remainder of the Gospel. For example, some have supposed that Mark's story of the feeding of the four thousand (8 : 1–10) is a duplicate version of the similar story of the feeding of the five thousand (6 : 30–44). (Observe how much more vague and generalized it is.) It is supposed that two versions of the same event might have been preserved in different sections of the early Church, and in the course of time each might have been told a little differently, until at last, when Mark came to write, the two stories were so different that he assumed that they referred to two separate events, and recorded them as such. Such an explanation may or may not be true, but if it *is* true, the rejection of the second story as unhistorical does not necessarily mean that there was no feeding of the multitude at all. Each event or saying must be judged upon its own merits, and in general, it is safe to assume that all of them are trustworthy, unless there is clear and strong evidence to the contrary.

(4) As to the minute details, such as the

exact wording of some saying of Jesus, or the setting or exact circumstances of his deeds, we must be ready to make allowance for some historical inaccuracies. Sometimes the author's particular views or prejudices are unconsciously reflected in the way he tells his story; sometimes allowance must be made for the natural tendency to legendize, or idealize, or to forget. Only so can many minute differences between corresponding narratives be reasonably explained.

10. **The Gospels fulfill the purpose for which they were written.** The Gospels thus present to us a solid body of historically trustworthy material, with a small fringe of un-historical detail. This ragged edge of uncertain details does not prevent the Gospels from accomplishing the great purpose for which their human authors wrote them, and for which God in his providence intended them. They give us a faithful and permanent impression of the character, career and ideas of Jesus Christ. If there are microscopic errors in them which the scientific historian is concerned about, they are nevertheless sufficiently accurate for all ordinary purposes of promoting the cause of Christianity in the lives of Christians and in the world. The interests of religion do not require the nice distinctions of the scientific

historian. Religion is not so vitally concerned to know exactly where the real shades off into the ideal, where history gives way to interpretation. It is sufficient for the culture of the religious life if we can be satisfied, not that everything in the Gospel did happen exactly as set down, but that it did so happen in the main, and that the remainder *could have happened* — that is, that in the narratives as we now have them we have a true impressionistic portrayal of the personality of Christ.

11. **A general principle for teachers.** As a rule, it is better for teachers in the church school to teach the stories of the Gospels just as they are given in the Gospels themselves,—avoiding language that raises the question of their accuracy. It is better not to enter into discussions regarding the trustworthiness of this or that detail until the pupils themselves raise the question seriously. The answer to be given then will depend upon the stage of mental maturity which the pupil has reached. Sometimes very little children will raise such questions, long before their minds are mature enough to understand what is involved in the distinction between real and ideal forms of truth. With such small children the better plan, if possible, is to postpone any detailed or scientific answer

until they are older, and to reply to their questions from the standpoint of their own limited understanding of what " true " means. One may say, for example, " Yes, this is true," or, perhaps, " Some think this is true, and some think it is not; but is it not just like Jesus to say (or do) this? "

But by and by, when the child has entered the adolescent period, the question, " Is this true? " assumes a new and serious importance. The mind is now developed to the point where it is ready for the distinction between real and ideal truth, or between fact and interpretation. A good illustration for the child at this time is the comparison between a painted landscape and a photograph of the same scene. The two pictures illustrate the two kinds of truth, and when the distinction is grasped, the pupil is ready to learn that the Gospels are not wholly like the photograph, but in a measure like the landscape, and that the painting is, after all, more valuable than the photograph if one wants primarily to enjoy the artistic beauty of the scene.

Teachers should never hesitate to face the possibility of contradictions or historical errors in the Gospels; and their explanation of such difficulties, if they really trouble the mind of the pupil, should always be of such a nature that the pupil when he grows older will not

have to say, "Once I was taught wrongly; but now I know better."

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

BURTON, *Short Introduction to the Gospels*, ch. IV.
DALE, *Living Christ and the Four Gospels*, ch. V.
KENT, *Life and Teachings of Jesus*, pp. 97–108 (miracles).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Try to appreciate the fact that the literary and historical standards in New Testament times were considerably different from those in our own times; e.g., in regard to copying freely, and often with deliberate changes, the writings of some one else, without acknowledgment; attributing speeches to persons whose words could not possibly have been reported verbatim; emphasis upon total impression rather than on minute accuracy in statements of fact. What influence should such considerations have upon one's attitude toward the Gospels as historical records?

2. What is the real fallacy in the argument that if the Gospels are untrustworthy in a single detail, they are untrustworthy in everything?

3. What evidences do you find in a general survey of present-day life that God is carrying out his purpose to make this world a good world by working through men's efforts rather than independently of man? Do you know of any evidences in history, other than the possible evidence of the Biblical miracles, that he ever works independently of man for the betterment of man's life?

4. Consider carefully the statement, "The laws of the universe are on the side of the good man." Are the "laws of nature" the same as the "laws of God"? How are the laws of the universe a positive help to the man who strives after goodness? (Give some illustrations.) How are they hostile to the man whose dominant purposes are not good?

5. In the consideration of any "miracle," note that there are always three distinct questions to be asked: (1) the scientific (philosophical) question, *Could it happen?* (2) the historical question, *Did it happen?* (3) the religious question, *What did (does) it mean?* The answer to the first hinges upon one's conception of God and his relation to nature; the answer to the second is solely a matter of historical and literary evidence; the answer to the third *may* be different for the first century conditions than for our modern world. Study carefully two or three of the Gospel miracles in the light of these three questions, and write out your answers. Use, e.g., the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, Mark 5 : 1–20; the healing of the centurion's servant, Matthew 8 : 5–13; the feeding of the multitude, Mark 6 : 30–44.

OUTLINE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

I Prologue: the Word Made Flesh, 1 : 1–18.

II The Early Period of Jesus' Ministry; Early Witnesses to Christ.

1 John the Baptist and the First Disciples, 1 : 19–51.

2 The Miracle at Cana; the Disciples' Faith Confirmed, 2 : 1–12.

3 The Cleansing of the Temple; the First Opposition, 2 : 2–22.

4 Nicodemus, 2 : 23 — 3 : 21.
5 The Samaritan Woman; Discourse on Worship, 4 : 1–42.
6 The Nobleman and His Son, 4 : 43–54.

III The Middle Period of Jesus' Ministry; Christ's Claims Accepted by a Few Individuals, but Rejected by the Jews as a Whole, ch. 5–12.
1 Healing of the Impotent Man at Bethesda; Christ as the One Sent from God, ch. 5.
2 Feeding the Multitude; Christ as the Bread of Life, ch. 6.
3 The Feast of Tabernacles; Christ as the Water of Life, chs. 7–8.
4 The Man Born Blind; Christ as the Light of the World, ch. 9.
5 The Feast of Dedication; Christ as the Good Shepherd, ch. 10.
6 The Raising of Lazarus; Christ as the Resurrection and the Life, ch. 11.
7 The Final Presentation and Rejection of Christ, ch. 12.

IV The Closing Period of Jesus' Ministry; Christ's Deeper Manifestation of Himself to His Disciples, chs. 13–17.
1 The Washing of the Disciples' Feet; a Lesson in Humility, 13 : 1–20.
2 The Exclusion of Judas, 13 : 21–30.
3 The Conversation in the Upper Room, 13 : 21 — 14 : 31.
4 Teachings on the Way to the Garden, chs. 15–16.
5 Christ's Farewell Prayer, ch. 17.

V The Death of Jesus; the Apparent Victory of Unbelief, chs. 18–19.

VI The Resurrection of Jesus; the Victory of Faith, ch. 20.

VII Appendix: Commission, Commendation and Conclusion, ch. 21.

JOHN, THE LATEST GOSPEL

CHAPTER VI

John, the Latest Gospel

1. **John's Gospel is different from the others.** When the first three Gospels are compared with one another, as we have had occasion to compare them in the previous chapters, it is found that in their broad outlines they resemble each other very closely. This is due, of course, to the fact that they have all been constructed on the basis of one original, namely, Mark. Because of this general resemblance these Gospels are commonly called the "synoptic" Gospels, meaning, "similar in appearance."

But when we turn to John we find ourselves in a totally different atmosphere. The outstanding characteristics of John's Gospel are not its resemblances to the other Gospels, but its striking differences from them.

2. **The tone is philosophical rather than historical.** In the very first verses we are introduced to a philosophical discussion of the eternal aspects of Christ, which represents him from a point of view altogether different from the simple, human portrait of

Mark. This philosophical or theological tone is carried right through the whole Gospel. The deeds of Jesus are narrated in such a way as to raise questions regarding his divine origin. The teachings of Jesus are also selected with a view to setting forth his claims to be "sent from God," or, as the introduction puts it, "the Word made flesh." No matter how intensely human and realistic the narratives are, we are never allowed to forget that this Jesus who moves about, performing "signs" and teaching great truths, is more than human; he is nothing less than God manifest in human form, undertaking in this way to reveal himself to mankind and to redeem mankind from sin and to bring to humanity a more abundant life. The speeches of Jesus are commonly about his claims to be "sent from God"; he presents himself as the Son of God, the bread of life, the living water, the light of the world. Whether he is driving the traders out of the temple, or talking with a wicked woman, or arguing with the Pharisees, or comforting his disciples before his death, or hanging on the cross, he is always represented by John as something more than a common man. And this desire to make the "divinity" of Christ stand out in all the story is what makes this Gospel strikingly different from the

others. This faith in the divinity of Christ is not absent from Matthew, Mark and Luke; nevertheless, it is by no means so deliberately forced upon the attention of their readers as we find it in John.

This theological purpose is not merely for the sake of presenting a theoretical discussion about the origin or meaning of Christ. The motive of this Gospel is intensely practical. The author wants his readers to see these superhuman aspects of Christ in order that they may put their faith in him as a Saviour and a living Lord. "These [things] are written," he declares, "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name" (20 : 31). It seemed to him of the first importance that his readers should know the ever-living Christ in their own personal experience, rather than that they should merely be familiar with the stories and traditions about his earthly life. Therefore he uses the stories about the earthly life of Jesus simply as a means of setting forth the truth about the divine, eternal Christ; his Gospel, in contrast with the other Gospels, is not fact suggesting meaning, but meaning recalling fact.

The influence of this strong theological aim is seen in the way the character of Jesus

is presented. One of the most remarkable features of John's portrait of Jesus is the absence of all human development in him. Such progress as there is in the story is dramatic rather than psychological; it is the development of an idea rather than a personality. The ideas of Jesus, his declarations about his Messiahship, his methods of teaching and working, his knowledge of his coming cross,[1] are all full-grown from the very first chapters. This is in marked contrast to the synoptic story, where we find Jesus frequently changing his methods and adopting new policies as to what he shall do and teach, as his experience develops, as the Pharisees grow more and more hostile, and as his disciples progress in their faith in him.

3. **As a rule, incidents (miracles) are made the texts for long discourses.** This is especially obvious in the central portion of the Gospel, where the healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda (chapter 5), the feeding of the five thousand (chapter 6), the journey to the Feast of Tabernacles (chapters 7 and 8), the healing of the man born blind (chapter 9), the Feast of Dedication (chapter

[1] John's Gospel represents Jesus as fully conscious from the beginning of a coming "hour" (the hour of his death) which should mark the consummation of his whole mission. See **2 : 4; 4 : 21, 23; 5 : 25, 28; 7 : 30; 8 : 20; 12 : 23, 27; 13 : 1; 16 : 32; 17 : 1.**

10), the raising of Lazarus (chapter 11), are all made the starting-point for long and profound discourses of Jesus concerning his unique relation to God and his peculiar mission to the world and to those who believe on him.

4. **The language and style of these discourses are due to the author rather than to Jesus.** This is a statement which, of course, can be verified more easily by those who read the Gospels in the original Greek than by those who read them only in the English versions. Still, it is possible for English readers to feel the truth of it by careful reading and study.

First, some of the long discourses in John should be read alongside of the discourses in the synoptic Gospels which are more or less parallel to them. Thus the third chapter of John might be read beside the eighteenth chapter of Matthew; the "Good Shepherd" discourse in John 10 alongside of the parables in Luke 15; the farewell teaching about going away and coming again (John 14 to 16), with the long discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming again of Christ, in Mark 13. One can hardly help feeling how great the difference is in the range of ideas, the vocabulary and the literary style between the synoptic teachings of Jesus and the Johannine teachings.

Then, when this difference has been appreciated, the discourses of Jesus in John should be studied in comparison with other portions of the Johannine writings where it is the author and not Jesus who is speaking. One of the best examples of this is to read Jesus' teachings in John 3 in comparison with John's first epistle, chapter 5 : 1–13. The ideas, the choice of words, the style of expression, are quite similar. Or, compare the teaching of Jesus in John 3 : 1–21 with the teaching of John the Baptist in the same chapter, verses 27–36. The ideas, the diction, the literary style of these two discourses are so much alike that if it were not for the introduction of the narrative in verses 22–26 we would not know that Jesus had stopped speaking and that the new speaker was John the Baptist. Such comparisons may be extended indefinitely, and they all point to the conclusion that the writer of this Gospel has *re-told* the teaching of Jesus, very largely in his own language and in his own style.

5. **Controversial aims in John's Gospel.** Toward the end of the first century Christianity had grown sufficiently strong to command serious attention from the Jews among whom it had had its origin, and from the pagan worshippers who found that the new cult was making inroads upon their

religions. As a result the new religion of Christ was attacked from many quarters, and was obliged to defend itself.

(1) The Jews had always been bitter enemies of the new faith, and the great achievement of Paul in lifting Christianity to the plane of a world religion was the outcome of long and bitter opposition from Jewish Christians who wanted the new faith to remain a sect of Judaism. When this Gospel was written this controversy with Judaism was not yet settled, and it is clear that the author selected much of the material of his Gospel with a view to showing Jesus' superiority to any merely Jewish ties. Not only the constant controversies with the Jews in which Jesus engages in this Gospel, but the whole portrait of Jesus as the eternal and universal Saviour[1] is intended to be a reply to those "Judaizers" who were still, at the end of the first century, claiming Christianity as a branch of the Jewish religion. Notice also how these controversies are commonly spoken of as being with the "Jews," instead of with the "Pharisees," as in the other Gospels.

(2) There were also heathen religious philosophies which at this time were beginning to attack Christianity. These attacks

[1] Cf. 3 : 16; 4 : 42; 10 : 16; 11 : 52; 12 : 32.

consisted of attempts to combine the heathen religious views with the doctrines of the Christians. The composite teaching thus formed became known as "Gnosticism," and its followers were Gnostics ("wise ones"). The Gnostics taught that the world (matter) was evil, and that Christ was separated from God by many intermediate ranks of angelic beings. They also held that the historical life of Jesus was of no value, because religion rested on ideas rather than on historical facts. It is not difficult to trace in this Gospel the writer's interest in defending Christianity from such false theories, which in his time were just beginning to gain headway among thinkers and teachers in the Church. The whole Gospel is intended to show that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the "only-begotten," than whom none is so closely related to the Supreme Deity. And this Gospel is written also for the express purpose of showing that the invisible, spiritual Christ, whom Christians believe in, to whom they prayed and looked for salvation, was a real, historical person, who had lived on earth in human form, and who was now exalted to the right hand of God.

6. **The "Johannine problem."** These characteristics of the fourth Gospel, the philosophical tone, the absence of any human

development in Christ, the peculiar style and circle of ideas with which the Gospel deals, the selection of materials to serve certain theological or controversial purposes, all create a problem of great complexity when we come to ask when and by whom this Gospel was written. Many volumes have been published on this subject, and the question is by no means settled yet to the satisfaction of all New Testament scholars. But a constantly increasing majority of scholars now feel that the old theory that this Gospel was written in its present form by John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, is not tenable, although the apostle may have had a share in furnishing the historical materials which the author has used in his work, thus justifying to some extent the common practice of referring to this Gospel as "The Gospel according to John."

7. **A working theory of how the Gospel was written.** It seems clear from a careful study of this Gospel that the author was familiar with Jewish history, places, customs, ideas and literature. Yet his philosophical ideas indicate that he was a resident of Ephesus when he wrote the Gospel, for Ephesus was the center of these views at that time. He is, of course, a Christian, and a leader and instructor of other Christians. Much

of his material is presented from the standpoint of one who saw with his own eyes the things he describes. This seems clear from the careful attention of the narrative to details, even though it may possibly have been mistaken in some instances. It should be noted that the author never names himself as "John," although he refers to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (a phrase which seems to be intended to refer to John the son of Zebedee) as the chief authority for what he says about the life of Jesus.[1]

These facts seem best to be explained by assuming that the Gospel was written by an unknown Christian leader in the last years of the first century or the opening years of the second, on the basis of reminiscences furnished him by some one (probably John himself) who had been a close companion of Christ. On this theory our fourth Gospel resembles Mark's Gospel, in that the writer depends for his historical sources on the apostle John, just as Mark depends on the apostle Peter. It is different from Mark, however, in that the materials have been worked over and expanded and interpreted and retold in the writer's own language (especially the teachings of Christ), while Mark's book seems to

[1] See especially 21 : 20 in connection with 21 : 24. Cf. also 18 : 16; 19 : 26; 20 : 2; 21 : 17.

preserve with remarkable fidelity the personal characteristics and language of Peter himself.

This does not mean that the author of our fourth Gospel has necessarily misrepresented Christ's ideas and claims, but it does mean that we must make some allowances for the writer's own ideas and point of view and vocabulary which we do not have to make when we study the synoptic Gospels.

8. **The historical value of this Gospel.** In the light of our discussion of the historical value of the synoptic Gospels, we may now try to summarize the historical value of John, on the basis of the statements just made concerning its origin and composition. (1) For the general chronology of Jesus' career, John is only a second rate authority. Its purpose was not chronological, but theological. (2) For the records of individual incidents in the life of Christ, the Gospel is a first rate authority. The narratives have all the characteristics of an eye-witness, and stand as high in general reliability as the incidents of the synoptic Gospels. (3) For the discourses of Jesus, John must be rated as a third-class authority. In all probability the sayings of Jesus recorded in John are based upon real, authentic teachings of Christ; but they have been retold in the author's own language, and they have prob-

ably often been expanded as the writer of the Gospel has carried their ideas out into his own interpretation and application.

It should not be forgotten that the greatest value of this or any other Gospel is not its minute historical accuracy, but the faithfulness with which it conveys to its readers a true impression of Jesus Christ. The ability of John's Gospel to lead people everywhere into a deep spiritual experience of the living Christ, is the standing proof of its superlative worth to the Church as a part of the Christian Bible.

9. **The great teachings of John's Gospel.** (1) *The Divine Sonship of Jesus Christ.* The writer declares that his purpose is to show that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20 : 21). In the light of the whole Gospel, that statement means that he desires to show that the title "Christ" (Messiah), or, as he prefers, "Son of God," is not to be defined in the old Jewish sense of a political deliverer, but in a deeper and more spiritual sense as One sent from God to bring to all men the true knowledge of God as the Father. This, as we saw in Chapter 3, is also one of the main objects of Matthew's Gospel. But John carries the deepening and the spiritualizing of the idea of Messiah much further than Matthew. According to Matthew, Jesus

tried to make it clear that his Messiahship did not mean political leadership so much as righteous character and lowly service. His greatness as the Messiah, or Anointed One, was moral greatness; his ascendancy over men was moral leadership. The writer of John is anxious to show even more than this. He wishes his readers to perceive that Jesus bears a peculiar and eternal relation to God, which he describes in his introduction under the figure of the "Word," and throughout the rest of the Gospel by means of the title "Son of God," or the "only-begotten Son."

John means by "Son of God" something different from what Matthew or the other Gospels mean by this term. In the synoptic Gospels the term is used simply as one of the well-known titles of the Jewish Messiah. But John gives it a profound theological meaning, suggesting by it that Jesus had lived eternally with God, that he was equal to and in some wonderful way identical with God, and that he had come into the world to save it.[1] Thus the name "Son of God," for John, is not so much a title describing Jesus' earthly life, as a doctrine, or theory, about Jesus' unique relation to God. In saying that his purpose in this Gospel is to show that

[1] See, for example, John 1 : 1–2; 10 : 30; 14 : 9; 3 : 16–17; 12 : 47.

Jesus is the Son of God, the author is therefore declaring that his chief object is to present a doctrine about Jesus, and to illustrate it by references to his historical career. In this Gospel we make the transition from history to theology.

(2) **The two worlds.** John's Gospel is deeply influenced by the idea that man's life is a battle-ground between two worlds, or two sets of forces, and that the problem of character is the problem of putting oneself on the side of the higher, better world. Sometimes these two sets of opposing forces are called "light" and "darkness." Thus, in 1 : 4, Jesus is referred to as the light, which shone into the darkness of the world's sin, and, though the forces of darkness did their best to overcome him, they were not able to capture him.[1] Sometimes the same opposition is described as "flesh" against "spirit," the two selves, so to speak, that are in every man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3 : 6; see also 6 : 63). Again, this idea of conflict is expressed in terms of "life" against "death"; death being the spiritual state into which one is brought by sin, and life representing the sum of all that Christ

[1] "Apprehend," not "comprehend," as in the King James version. See also 3 : 19–21.

has to bestow. In this view of life as a battle-ground between opposing forces, the teaching of John's Gospel is strikingly similar to the teaching of the first Epistle, and it is probable that the development of this conception is largely the result of the author's own brooding over the less philosophical teaching of Christ.

(3) **Eternal life.** The phrase "eternal life" is not absent from the synoptic Gospels, but the fourth Gospel goes much further than they do in emphasizing it as one of the main teachings of Christianity. It was easy and natural for people in those days, as it is in our own time, to drift into the notion that eternal life means the life one expects to live after death, and that will continue its existence endlessly. That is certainly true, so far as it goes. But according to John's Gospel, when one has said that he has missed the deepest truth of the phrase. It is one of the main objects of this Gospel to show that (1) eternal life is not merely endless existence, but a moral and spiritual quality that characterizes the life of one who believes in Jesus, and that (2) this new spiritual life begins, not at death, but the moment one accepts Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Thus, this Gospel declares that the great purpose of Christ's coming was that men "may have life, and may have it abun-

dantly" (10 : 10). He came to impart, by the contagion of his own pure, strong character, a life built of such eternal qualities — love, truth, righteousness — that the changing ages cannot destroy it. And when one receives, or welcomes, Christ into his heart, this life begins at once in him; he is "born from above" (3 : 3); he "hath" (present tense, not future) "eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath" (already) "passed out of death into life" (5 : 24).

(4) **Faith and knowledge.** The Gospel of John declares again and again, with tireless insistence, that the way into the Christian life is by believing, or by faith, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The word "believe" is used in nearly every chapter, and occurs ninety-nine times in the whole Gospel; it is the key-word of the Gospel. But believing in Christ is carefully described as something much deeper and more vital than merely accepting a certain doctrine about Jesus. We often use the word in the sense of giving mental assent to some idea or proposition. To believe in Christ is much more than this. It means to commit oneself, absolutely, finally, and unreservedly, for time and eternity, to the life of *obedience* to Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not

see life" (3 : 36). It is the faith that expresses itself in obedience that makes the Christian sure of God and of eternal life. Hence, the life of faith is also said to consist in knowledge, — not in the ordinary sense of possessing information, but in the deeper sense of *knowing by experience.* "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (17 : 3; cf. 7 : 17).

(5) **The Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ.** John's Gospel makes much of Jesus' teaching on these subjects, especially in chapters 14–16. To understand that teaching, which the author has carefully presented so as to meet the particular needs of his immediate readers, one must recall the time and circumstances of the publication of this Gospel. Nearly one hundred years had passed since the birth of Jesus, and nearly seventy years since he had departed to "go to the Father." The hopes which the early Christians had fondly cherished, that he would soon visibly return to them, had not been realized. He had not come back; at least, *not in that way.* Nearly all these first disciples were now dead. John himself was probably the last survivor among the original apostles. With the failure of those early hopes to materialize, the Church in the days

when this Gospel was written was facing a critical situation. The faith of many Christians was sorely shaken, for they felt that Christ had not kept his promise to come back to them. One of the great objects which the author had in view when he wrote this Gospel, was to suggest to his readers that they had been mistaken in looking for a visible and bodily return of Jesus. For Jesus, he seems anxious to point out, *had* returned, even as he said he would. The "Comforter," concerning whom he has much to say in chapters 14 to 16, was just Jesus himself come back spiritually, to live among them, in fulfillment of his promise, "I will not leave you desolate; I come unto you" (14 : 18).

The Church was looking for a future return of Jesus; but, as this Gospel points out (16 : 17–22), Jesus intended to return immediately. The Church was looking for a return that would be public and visible; but Jesus himself (so the writer is careful to show, 14 : 21–23) taught that he could not reveal himself to all, but only to those who loved him and believed in him.

Jesus, therefore, according to this Gospel, is now present; just as really, personally present as he can ever be; no visible coming can make him more really present than he is today, as his Spirit dwells in the hearts

of his faithful followers, and binds them into the fellowship of the Christian Church. Thus all that is vital in his promise about coming again has already been fulfilled. In view of theories regarding the "second coming" of Christ that are widely held today, the teaching of John's Gospel on this subject is of great practical importance and will repay the most careful study.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Goodspeed, *Story of the New Testament*, ch. XVII.
Burton, *Short Introduction to the Gospels*, ch. V.
Bacon, *Making of the New Testament*, ch. IX.
Von Soden, *History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 390–425.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Read the Gospel of John through, if possible at one sitting, following the Outline on page 115. What reasons do you find for putting this Gospel in a class by itself, as compared with the other Gospels? E.g., as to (1) the author's aim and point of view, as reflected in the Prologue, 1 : 1–18, and Conclusion, 20 : 31; (2) the kind of material which the author has selected; (3) his general method of treating his biographical material.

2. What evidences do you find in John 3 : 1–18; 11 : 41–42; chap. 17, that the words attributed to Jesus are, at least in part, really the language of the evangelist?

3. Compare the "parable" of the Good Shepherd, John 10 : 1–18, with the parable of the Lost Sheep, Luke 15 : 3–7. What differences do you note as to the aims of each? their methods of presentation?

4. What is the earliest indication, according to this Gospel, that Jesus was conscious of the coming cross and resurrection? How does this compare with Mark? What does the comparison suggest as to John's conception of Christ?

5. According to John 10 : 11–18, who was primarily responsible for the death of Jesus? In the face of this passage, how would you answer the charge that Jesus' death was the suicide of a fanatic?

6. In John, the "supper discourses," chaps. 13–16, occupy the same general position in the Gospel story that the discourses about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age hold in the synoptic Gospels. Both are given as Jesus' "farewell" teaching, embodying his views and instructions about the future. Compare John 13–16 with Mark 13 (or Matthew 24–25), and note what differences, if any, you find regarding the time and manner of Jesus' "return."

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

CHAPTER VII

The Historical Jesus

1. **Scientific and devotional study of the Gospels.** It is a principle of the first importance, in all worthy study of the Gospels, that there is no essential distinction between "scientific" and "devotional" study. By "scientific" we mean, of course, that sort of study which comes to the Bible with a mind open to all the facts, literary and historical as well as religious, which may be discovered in its writings. It is the attitude which, in the phrase of Coleridge, insists on "studying the Bible just as we would study any other book." That is what we have tried to do in the preceding chapters. Our method stands in sharp contrast with the method which many have tried to follow, in which the Bible is used merely to furnish "proof-texts" to show that such and such a view of religion must be right, and differing views must be wrong.

In studying the Bible for personal religious culture, the more "scientific" we are in our

attitude toward it, the more likely we shall be to discover in it those religious truths which are of deep and lasting value to our lives. The one aim of all truly scientific study in any field is the discovery of truth, and that is exactly the one great aim of truly devotional Bible study. We do not have to throw away our scientific spirit when we seek to build Christian character through the reverent study of the Bible. We need that spirit, and the more we have of it the better.

We do need, however, to be on our guard against studying the Bible with an interest that is intellectual merely, and not deeply personal and spiritual. It is quite possible to fill one's mind as full as an encyclopedia with all sorts of interesting and valuable facts about the Gospels, and yet be very far from gathering inspiration from them for living a Christian life. What we get out of our Bible study will depend on what we are especially interested in getting. There is a poem about three friends, a physician, a teacher and a scientist, who spent a holiday together in a country walk. When they came back the physician was quite excited about the unsanitary conditions he had found among the farmers; the teacher had several pages in his notebook full of the oddities and colloquialisms which he had heard in the speech

of the country folk; and the scientist was rejoicing because he had added ten new bugs to his collection. Each got something of what he was most interested in. Our study of the Bible is governed by the same law of interest. If we are interested only in the peculiar customs and manners of ancient people, we shall find much in the Bible of antiquarian value. If we have a feeling for beautiful poetry or striking figures of speech, the Bible will reward our study with great literary treasures. If we want to know something about the movements of history in ancient times, we shall find the Bible a valuable source-book for the study of certain nations and periods of antiquity. But we may study the Bible with all these interests in view, and still be very far from being better Christians because of our study. If the Bible is to yield its richest treasures to the student, he must study it for the purpose of finding out what it has to teach regarding the Christian way of life. It is when we come to the Bible with that aim, that our study of it becomes " devotional " study.

In regard to the Gospels, which are the subject of this book, we may put the foregoing truth in this form: the true aim in all our study of the Gospels should be the discovery of the historic personality of Jesus Christ.

2. **The modern return to Jesus Christ.** There has never been a time since the Christian Church began, when Jesus Christ has not been formally recognized as the center of the whole Christian system. All the great creeds, ancient and modern, however widely they may differ in other matters, agree in this, that Christianity is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

But it was not long after the founding of Christianity, that the interest of the great leaders and thinkers in the Church turned away from the historical career of Jesus and became focussed upon various theories about him. Men lost interest in the life of Jesus, and became absorbed in the doctrine about Jesus. They engaged in profound and vast speculations regarding the mystery of Christ's nature, without hitching their speculations to the actual facts of his earthly life. They built their teachings on the epistles of Paul and neglected the Gospels. Christ, to the thinkers from the days of the apostles right down to the early days of the nineteenth century, was a theological doctrine rather than an historical personage. He was thought of chiefly as some mysterious God-man, of some strange blend of human and divine natures, instead of the simple, winsome personality that meets us in the pages of the

Gospel of Mark. The historical Jesus was forgotten, and the theological Christ was elaborated until his features could no longer be recognized as the features of the Man of Nazareth. That is the story of the main currents of the Christian Church's treatment of Christ through the centuries. There were noble exceptions here and there, of course, but the prevailing attitude toward Christ was to hide his historical life behind a theory or doctrine about his person.

If you go into any well-equipped religious library, you will find shelf after shelf filled with books classed as "Lives of Christ." In them you may read, from the varying standpoints of a great multitude of writers, the story of Jesus of Nazareth, told in the fashion of ordinary biography, from the material to be found in the four Gospels. But you will also find that this vast literature on the historical life of Christ is all less than one hundred years old. The study of the historical career of Jesus is a distinctly modern movement in the history of Christianity.

The movement began in 1835, when a German scholar, David Friedrich Strauss, published his *Leben Jesu* ("Life of Jesus"). This work of Strauss' was the first serious attempt to write a biography of Jesus in

modern times, and almost the first in the whole Christian era. Strauss was a pioneer. His book had many faults, and is not regarded very seriously today. Even when he first published it, his radical views about Christ, so different from the views that were then considered orthodox, aroused a great storm of criticism and protest. Strauss himself was expelled from the University where he had given promise of a brilliant career. But he had lighted a torch, and the torch kindled a mighty fire. The " back to Jesus Christ " movement had begun.

The second noteworthy attempt to write a biography of Jesus was by a Frenchman, Ernest Renan, who published his *Vie de Jesu* (" Life of Jesus ") in 1863. Renan's " Life of Jesus " was even more famous than that of Strauss because the author was a man of extraordinarily brilliant imagination, and wrote in a superb literary style. These two books laid the foundation of the modern study of the life of Christ.

From this time on the tide of interest swung away from the speculations of the theologians. " Back to Christ! " was the watch-word of religious thinking. And in the sixty years since Renan's book appeared, an ever-swelling stream of " Lives of Christ " has shown us how the earthly career of Jesus

has captured the attention of the Christian world. In Germany, England, Scotland and America the study of the Gospel records of Jesus, the appreciation of the historical Jesus Christ, has been the all-absorbing theme of Christian thinkers and writers, of preachers and Bible teachers. Today it is a simple fact that the four Gospels are being studied with a minuteness and devotion and appreciation that have never been given to any other writings in the world's history. Today the real historical Jesus is better known, better understood, and better loved, than he has ever been in the history of his Church.

What is the significance of all this modern interest in the history of Jesus? Just this, that the Christian Church is learning more deeply than ever before that the Christian life centers in a personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, and not merely in confessing one's belief in certain doctrines about him. To be a Christian is not so much a matter of being "orthodox" as a matter of being loyal. It is not intellectual assent merely, but obedience, that makes one a Christian.

3. **The discovery of Jesus Christ in the Gospels.** The great aim in all worthy study of the Gospels is the discovery of the historical personality of Jesus Christ. Successful Gospel study means that Jesus Christ stands out

in our thinking vividly real, the lines of his portrait filled in with clear-cut strokes as we have discovered him in this or that situation in his earthly career. When we study some particular incident, say the healing of the man born blind (John 9), the test of our study is not how real the blind man has become to our imagination, but how real Jesus Christ has become. And so, in every section of the Gospels, we try to see what Jesus Christ is like, by viewing him in the midst of the words and deeds that filled his busy days.

4. **What one discovers in the historical Jesus.** Let us try to sum up, in a general statement, what the search for the real historical Jesus reveals, as we take the details of the Gospel stories and bring them together into a general portrait of Christ. We find that in certain respects Jesus is like ourselves, and in certain other respects he is very different from ourselves.

5. **A Personality intensely like ourselves: human.** The first impression one gets of Jesus when he comes to the Gospels with an open mind is the *humanness* of Jesus. He is a real human being, with the common characteristics of other human beings. Physically, he is just like other men. His body grows just as other human bodies grow; at one time

he is a baby, helpless, utterly dependent upon his mother's care; by and by he is a boy, with a boy's growth, a boy's inquisitiveness, a boy's love of travel and adventure. Then we see him grown up, shouldering the burden of a man's life in the world, working as other men work, getting tired and needing rest as other men do. He uses his feet to walk, his hands to toil, his eyes to see, his ears to hear, his mind to think, just as other men do. Physically, he is intensely like us: *human.*

If we study his mental life, again we find him just like ourselves. His mind grows, just as ours do. When he was a little child he did not know as much as he knew when he grew up; he went to school and learned, like other boys. Like all of us, there were many things he never did know; he was always asking ordinary questions, seeking for information. His friends speculated about the time when the world was going to end; Jesus said he didn't know. He did not seem to know anything about our modern science, such as our germ-theory of disease, but shared the common ideas of his time in regard to the cause and nature of human ailments. As far as we can tell, he shared the belief of his time that the earth was flat, and that the "heavens" were regions up above the solid arch of the sky. When he chose his disciples,

he seems to have believed that Judas was as promising as the rest of them; there is no certain intimation that he knew beforehand that Judas would prove a traitor. All the way through his career we see his mental life is just like the mental life of other people.

Even in his spiritual life, he is like ourselves when we are at our best. For the deepest fact in Jesus' character is that he recognized that the spiritual life is the highest part of life; he lived and taught on that assumption; and so do we, when we are at our best.

In all the common characteristics of human life, then, we discover in the historical Jesus a man intensely like ourselves: *human*.

6. **A Personality vitally different from ourselves: unique.** There are certain features, however, about this man whom we discover in our study of the Gospels, in which he is strikingly different from other people, and no portrait of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels is complete, or scientifically fair to him, that does not include these unique features.

(1) **His sense of God *vs.* his sense of sin.** The most remarkable characteristic of Jesus' life was his unfailing sense of God. He lived in the perpetual consciousness of communion with his heavenly Father. With the possible exception of a few moments on the cross,

he seems never to have lost this " awareness " of God. Of him, in the most perfect fashion conceivable, it can be said that " in God he lived, and moved, and had his being." God was always as real to him as the air he breathed.

This fact alone would mark Jesus off from the great majority of other men, as an unusual religious genius. But when we consider this fact in connection with the absence of any sense of sin or moral failure in his life, it becomes absolutely unique. For Jesus seems never once to have had any sense of any wrong-doing for which he needed to ask God's forgiveness. He lived his life openly, in the face of fierce enmity and criticism, and yet he constantly challenged even his foes to find any flaws in his character. " Which of you convicteth me of sin? " (John 8 : 46) " I do always the things that are pleasing to him " (John 8 : 29). When he made the latter statement we might be inclined to say, " Yes, but other men might say the same thing, and they might be wrong." But we read that when Jesus declared that his life was always well-pleasing to God, " many believed on him." The story is told of a man who said to Thomas Carlyle, " I have reached the point where I can say, with Jesus Christ, ' I and my Father are one.' " Carlyle's

rough but splendid answer was, "Yes, but Jesus Christ got the world to believe him!" The fact that Jesus never lost his sense of fellowship with God, and at the same time was never conscious of any sin in his life that needed God's forgiveness, contradicts all human experience absolutely. For the unfailing law of the religious life is that the more deeply we become conscious of the God whom Jesus taught us to believe in, the more deeply we realize how unworthy we are of communion with him, and how much there is in our lives that needs his mercy and forgiveness. The absence of any such feeling on the part of Jesus is a trait that is absolutely unique.

(2) **His timeless outlook *vs.* his historical attachments.** Another fact that marks Jesus off as a unique personality is the fact that he always saw beyond the temporary and local conditions of his life, and what he said and did have proved to be of permanent value. A man like other men, as we have seen, he lived as other men lived, in the midst of his own country and people and times. He was a Jew by birth, by education and by religious inheritance, and his life was spent almost entirely among his own countrymen. When he taught he was compelled, if he would get himself understood at all, to teach in the language, by means of the ideas, and according

to the customs of the people who listened to him. His speech was the common Aramaic speech of his land. His illustrations, by means of which he expressed and made clear his ideas, were from the commonest objects and customs of his day. His truths were taught as all new truths have always to be taught, by building upon the foundations of what people around him already knew or believed. He was a true man of his time, like other men in his historical attachments.

And yet his teachings are absolutely universal and permanent. Underneath the wrappings of Jewish speech and customs are always to be found ideas that are just as true for the Greeks and Romans as they are for Jews, and just as true for this twentieth century as they were for his own generation. The speech of Palestine has become obsolete, a dead language. The customs to which Jesus referred for illustration have mostly been left behind in the march of civilization. But the truths he taught through these are just as true today as they were then. Not one thing that Jesus taught has ever had to be unlearned. Indeed, the world is turning wistfully to the teachings of this Christ today as never before, and vaguely beginning to realize that the truths he taught are after all the only hope of civilization, and that they

have never yet been given a real trial in the life of the world. No other religious teacher has so perfectly blended a life of simple conformity to his own age, with absolute timelessness in his teachings, as Jesus Christ. In this, too, he is unique.

(3) **His personal claims *vs.* his personal sanity.** Once more, when we come to examine the career of Jesus, we cannot fail to be amazed at the stupendous claims he made for himself. Other great religious teachers have claimed great personal honors and titles; yet no other has claimed such final powers of revealing God, of saving men, and such rights of final judgment, as Jesus Christ. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11: 28). The beauty and winsomeness of these great words must not blind us to the stupendous claim they contain, that Christ is humanity's great Rest-Giver. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28 : 18). Was ever any claim to ascendancy over men more absolute than this? "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." "I and my Father are one." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." What are we to think of such announcements?

We may say at once, that if any ordinary person should appear in our midst today and make such claims as these about himself, our first thought would be that he was a man of unbalanced mind. We should have him examined in regard to his sanity. Men have made such claims, in our own day as well as in other days; but these assertions have always proved in a short time to be the flights of a disordered brain. But when we study Jesus Christ, as we find him in the Gospels, the one fact about him that is more certain than any other is that he was not insane. No saner, sweeter, more wholesome human spirit ever lived. He was scrupulous about his times of retirement for contemplation and prayer, so that his thinking and his teaching might never become fanatical or unbalanced. His judgment regarding the simplest problems that confronted him, as well as the deepest problems of human life, stand the test of time; his decisions have never had to be reversed. No man ever lived a sounder, saner life than Jesus lived.

If these tremendous claims to be the Messiah, the sole Revealer of God, the Saviour and the final Judge of men, were the utterances of a wild-minded fanatic, we should simply dismiss them, and class Jesus with other extremists of which history is full.

But when we couple these claims with his marvelous poise and sanity of mind, they constitute a trait in him that is unshared by any other man: *unique.*

7. **Summary: the Jesus Christ of history.** To gather together the facts that we have been noting into a summarized portrait of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, we have to say, first, that Jesus Christ is a real, historical person, a man who lived a truly human life, and who fills a place in the great stream of human history just as other men have done. But we have to say, in the second place, that there are some unique facts about him that cannot be explained by comparing him with other men. Certain laws of life which are universal so far as other men are concerned are not true of him; he is the Great Exception.

It is just these unique traits which we have noted that have led Christians in all ages to feel that Jesus must be described in terms that are more than ordinary human terms. Upon these facts, in which he is the Great Exception to common humanity, have been built all the various theories about the divinity of Christ. Many and various are the descriptions of this "divine" or unique aspect of Christ, for all of them are just human attempts to account for these peculiar facts, and each view depends upon the view-

point and mental make-up of the one who constructs it. It is not necessary to say that the doctrine of Christ's divinity taught by this theologian or that is the only true one; perhaps there are elements of truth in most of them. Nor is it proper to say that when one accepts such and such a person's teaching about the divinity of Christ, that then and then only can one fairly be called a Christian. But it does seem necessary that in our total estimate of the personality of Jesus Christ we shall recognize certain features in which he differs vitally from all other men who have lived in history, and that these features are what have given him his supreme ascendancy over the life and thinking of mankind.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

JEFFERSON, *Character of Jesus*, ch. XXVI. (The Greatness of Jesus.)
GLOVER, *The Jesus of History*, chs. I, III, IV.
SIMPSON, *The Fact of Christ*, pp. 39–50.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Alexander, Socrates, Napoleon, Lincoln, are universally numbered among the world's great men. What is the outstanding trait or achievement in each one that entitles him to such fame? In comparison with these men, what is the one outstanding fact about Jesus that entitles him to rank as the world's Greatest Man?

2. If Jesus had come to live his earthly life in the midst of our twentieth-century America, he would doubtless have presented his message about God and duty in the language and forms of our modern thought. Would his essential message have been different? (i.e., would he have *omitted* or *altered* any of his fundamental views, or *added* others as equally essential?) Would the modern world have rejected him, as the Jews of Palestine did?

3. Study the following typical examples of Jesus' teaching: Matthew 5 : 21–24; Luke 18 : 1–7; John 16 : 2–3. In each case distinguish between the outer, temporal *form* of his teaching, and the inner, permanent *truth*.

4. Are the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Matthew 5 : 38–47) intended to apply to nations as well as individuals? Why do not the modern nations take them seriously?

5. Study Jesus' activity in the cleansing of lepers (e.g., Mark 1 : 40–44; Luke 17 : 12–19). May the fact of his own perfect physical health have had something to do with his fearlessness in coming into contact with contagious diseases, and his immunity from them?

THE CHRIST OF EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER VIII

The Christ of Experience

1. **The effects of the discovery of the Personality of Jesus Christ.** It is impossible for any one to come consciously into the presence of a powerful personality without being profoundly influenced by it. The presence and activity of a Lincoln or a Roosevelt are bound to rouse in men strong feelings of friendship or enmity. Such feelings are the stronger and more inescapable as the man in question possesses a more powerful personality and as one's contact with him is more intimate. This is supremely true of the remarkable personality of Jesus Christ. Let us, then, trace out the inevitable results of our discovery of this personality in the Gospels.

(1) **He compels our admiration.** No one can read the Gospels thoughtfully and with an open mind without feeling at once the wonderful attractiveness of the character of Jesus. The same fascination, or charm, that drew the multitudes irresistibly around him in his earthly career sends out its influence as his character discloses itself in the study of

the Gospels. The beautiful tenderness and abounding strength; the splendid courage that dared confront the vested interests of his day; the wooing sympathy of his invitation to the weary and heavy-laden; the unaffected love for little children; the patient forbearance toward his disciples; the unerring tactfulness of his dealing with all sorts of people; the sublime heroism of his great sacrifice; these are among the qualities that have endeared him to humanity. Multitudes have resisted his appeal, denied his claims, resented his interference with their lives, refused to obey his commands, but not one who faces him thoughtfully can help admiring him.

(2) **He measures up to our moral ideal.** For nineteen centuries the character of Jesus has been exposed to the keenest scrutiny and criticism that have ever been directed toward a human life. And no one has yet found any warrant for asserting that Jesus comes short in any trait demanded by the highest conscience and morality of men. As an ideal for individual life he satisfies our deepest instincts of what is right. As a pattern for human society, no social ideal has yet been discovered higher than that which he exemplified in his own conduct and expressed in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. What is there in his teaching that has had

the effect of spoiling life at any point? Where is the child who has been denied his right to live a child's life, and to grow into beautiful youth and fine manhood, because Jesus Christ came into human history? Where is the woman whose womanhood has been degraded because of anything contemptuous toward her sex in the teaching of Jesus? Where has industrialism found any warrant for setting property above personality in any word uttered, or influence exerted, by this man? To ask such questions is to declare that all the highest goals of individual or social life toward which mankind is slowly and painfully struggling are just those set forth in the teaching of Christ, and embodied in his personal life and conduct.

The only serious criticism that has been possible to the thoughtful student of Jesus is the fear that leads him to say, " His character is too perfect, the ideal is too far beyond me; give me Buddha or Confucius as my example and I can follow hopefully; but set before me Jesus Christ and I am in despair; I can never hope to attain the pure and lofty level of his life." Such a criticism is natural enough; yet it is not well-founded; for no one can find permanent satisfaction in any ideal that is less than the best he knows. When the man who makes such a criticism

as this comes to his best moods, and takes counsel with his highest self, he is led to say, "Practical or impossible, within my reach or forever beyond it, no other conception of life so perfectly matches all that is highest and best and noblest in me as this life of Jesus Christ."

(3) **He challenges our moral choice.** Like all strong characters, the personality of Jesus makes an appeal to our moral natures, an appeal for something more than emotional admiration, or intellectual assent to his perfection. He appeals to our wills, our power of moral choice.

That was the constant effect of his presence during his earthly life. The crowds were drawn to him as to a magnet; they could not let him alone. As they faced his teaching they were compelled to admit that "never man spake as this man." But they were also constrained by his forceful personality to do something more; they found that they must either follow him or reject him. The presence of Jesus invariably challenged the conscience of those who came close enough to really know him. They had to become his friends or his enemies, and that not passively, but actively. They must surrender themselves to the ideal which they saw and felt in him, or they must harden their hearts

against that ideal of life. The one impossible attitude in his presence was moral neutrality.

As the same great personality discloses himself to the student of the Gospels today, the same influence is exerted, and the modern student finds in this Christ the same challenge to his moral nature. Still Jesus Christ not only attracts men, but sifts them. Still contact with him creates moral issues. His presence inevitably produces crises in one's inner life. Shall I accept his way of life, and reverently and obediently follow him? Or shall I choose the lower, less perfect way, and surrender myself a little longer to the life that is less than the best? Some such questioning is inevitable when one really faces Jesus Christ. The only way to escape it is to stop facing him; but even this is no real escape, for, the issue having once been raised, to refuse his challenge is to take sides, morally, against him. The only answer that brings satisfaction to one's deepest nature is such an answer as Richard Watson Gilder expresses in the well-known lines:

" If Jesus Christ is a man,
And only a man, I say
That of all mankind I will cleave to him,
And to him I will cleave alway.

"If Jesus Christ is a God,
And the only God, I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
Through the earth and the sea and the air!"

2. **What, then, is a Christian?** In the light of all the facts which we have studied in this book about the Gospels and the Christ whose earthly life is recorded in them, we are now ready to frame a simple, yet comprehensive definition of the Christian life. A Christian is one who faces the personality of Jesus Christ, feels the challenge which that personality makes to his moral nature, and responds obediently to it.

3. **The breadth of this definition.** It is important to observe what this definition does not include.

(1) It does not mean that there is any simple, uniform type of Christian experience or behavior. There is no standard set of beliefs or prayers or emotions or public behavior by which all alike can be measured to see whether they are Christians or not.

It used to be supposed that no one could be a Christian unless he had passed through a convulsive experience of conversion, in which his emotions were aroused to such a pitch of intensity that it seemed as if some supernatural conflict between Satan and God

were going on inside of him. There can be no question that many have made the start in the Christian life to the accompaniment of such emotional upheavals. But intense emotion is not a universal test of whether one is a Christian or not. Large numbers of earnest Christians, whose natures are balanced and steady, and whose lives have developed evenly and naturally, have entered into the conscious Christian life without any unusual excitement whatever.

Nor is the plan, or pattern, of Christian conduct the same for all Christians. There is no detailed code of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" which regulates the coming and going, the doing and not doing, of all Christians alike. Of course, we have principles of the Christian life set forth in the whole example and teaching of Jesus Christ. But Jesus never intended his teaching to be hardened into literal rules for the regulation of life's details. Christian conduct is bound by just two great limits: the ideals discoverable in the life and teachings of Jesus, and the application of these ideals by the individual conscience which is trained to face the personality of Jesus Christ habitually.

No two Christians who are living in close touch with Jesus Christ will regulate the details of their lives in exactly the same way.

For Christ deals individually with each soul. His words of daily command, or, to say the same thing in the more scientific phraseology of our day, the impulses of conscience that will be aroused when Christians bring themselves inquiringly into the presence of his personality, are for no two persons exactly alike. He will say something, just as surely as one confronts him with the prayer, "What shall I do, Lord?" He will answer through the reaction of conscience, and one's duty will be made clear; but the duty in each case will depend upon the individual needs of the one who seeks, and will not necessarily be the same as the duty or task he lays upon the conscience of the next person who comes to him.

(2) Our definition does not mean that every Christian will be led to explain the personality of Christ in the same terms. No particular formula, or doctrinal statement of the "divinity" of Christ, can be taken as a universal test of whether one is a Christian or not. We have seen in the last chapter that there are certain great facts about Christ which must be taken into account in any attempt to explain him. Some of these facts can be explained easily enough in the terms of our common humanity. Other facts are unique; they put Christ in a class by himself. Any explanation which accounts for these

facts that are unique will be an explanation which cannot be applied to any other human being. *What* explanation we shall give will depend largely on the kind of ideas and terms that fit our particular mental make-up. Some will be satisfied with such terms as "perfect humanity, humanity raised to the *n*-th power, unique human individuality," and the like. Others will be better satisfied with Biblical terms, like "God with us, the Word made flesh, the only-begotten Son of God, God in Christ," etc. Others, again, will find it more satisfying to employ terms like "divinity, deity, revelation of God, God-man, God incarnate, having the value of God, two natures in one person, very God and very man," etc.

But not one of these many formulas, or the theories about Christ which they try to express, can be applied to all Christians as a test of whether their Christianity is genuine or not. For no two Christian minds are just alike, and no explanation of Christ will satisfy all minds equally well.

If the words which Thomas addressed to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20 : 28), are understood as the earnest and sincere confession that Jesus had come to be to him the rightful Master of his life and the supreme object of his devotion, and are

not taken as expressing any particular metaphysical theory about him, then they are words which are pretty sure to express the feeling of every Christian sooner or later, who comes to know Christ in something of the same intimate fashion in which Thomas knew him.

(3) Our definition does not mean that the Christian will be a person of mature spiritual experience at the very beginning of his Christian life. The Christian life is essentially the habit of facing Christ and letting Christ make his own appeal, day after day and year after year. But Christ is a Teacher, and Christians are growing persons. The teacher begins with the simple and more elementary things, and by and by we grow able to see and do the harder and bigger things. In the twilight before the dawn one can distinguish faintly the outlines of the larger pieces of furniture; as the light grows stronger the smaller objects appear, the comb and brush on the dresser, the details of the pictures on the walls. And when the sun shines at last directly into the room, then even the particles of dust floating in the air are clearly visible. So as one lives in the presence of Christ, the light of Christ's personality will shine brighter and brighter, and will reveal deeper and deeper facts in one's life, sins and weaknesses

that were unsuspected, powers and tasks that were undreamed of; and each new discovery will bring with it new duties of self-conquest or service. So the Christian life is a never-ending process of self-discovery in the increasing light of Christ, and of self-surrender and obedience to Christ.

4. **The depth of this definition.** It is equally important to understand what our definition of a Christian does include.

To begin the Christian life is to face the personality of Jesus Christ, and for the first time to recognize the moral demands which Christ makes upon one, and to begin to obey those demands. To live the Christian life day by day is to face Christ habitually, and to respond habitually to the ever-increasing appeal which he makes to one's moral nature with ever renewed surrender and obedience.

One does not prove that he is a Christian because he can point to some act of obedience yesterday or last year. The proof that one is living a Christian life today is that he is hearing and obeying the voice of Christ today. In other words, it is not this or that act of obedience which makes one a Christian, but the *habit* of bringing one's life regularly and persistently into the presence of Christ, and responding obediently to each new Christian impulse thus aroused. The

heart of the matter, then, is to know where to find Christ, and, knowing where he is, to cultivate the habit of facing him daily and obeying him.

5. **Where is Christ to be found today?** (1) The object of this book has been to show that the personality, or spirit, of Jesus Christ has been preserved in the four Gospels. That is the purpose for which, in the providence of God, the Gospels were written. There is nothing mysterious or magical about this. Where is the personality of Milton to be found today? In "Paradise Lost" or "L'Allegro" or "Il Penseroso." We study the poems which Milton wrote, and his spirit kindles ours while we do so. The spirit of Sir Walter Scott still influences those who read the Waverley novels or Lockhart's great biography. Just so the personality of Jesus resides in the Gospels, and we can find him by the scientific and reverent study of these four memoirs.

If the Christian life is to grow normally, there must be a constantly increasing knowledge of the historical Christ. Let no new ardent disciple imagine that he can learn all that the Gospels have to teach him about his Master in a few lessons. The great Personality who speaks from those pages cannot be exhausted in a few sessions of the "morn-

ing watch." Christ cannot be understood once for all. He grows upon one, as one's Christian life advances. New light is ever breaking forth from God's Word. No matter how many years have been spent already in consecrated study, when the inquiring disciple comes to the Christ of the Gospels again, he finds that there is still something new; some fresh vision of the beauty and glory of the Master breaks upon the soul, some call to deeper and further consecration is heard, some fresh insight is gained into the meaning of the life of love.

This truth lays upon every earnest Christian a definite and solemn obligation to set apart time and strength sufficient for the progressive study of Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the four Gospels. The law of Christian growth is as inexorable as any other law of life. Life depends upon growth; where growth is suppressed, life itself shrivels and dies. And growth is dependent upon the simple, yet absolutely inescapable condition of regular and proper nourishment. There is no option for the Christian in this matter. One's spiritual life itself is at stake; for it cannot function unless it is nourished by regular and earnest *thinking* about Jesus Christ as he is found in the Gospels.

(2) But it is not alone in the Gospels that

the personality of Jesus Christ is to be found. He is also to be discovered and faced in the practice of prayer.

There are two reasons why the study of the Gospels apart from prayer is not an adequate means of holding one's life under the influence of Christ. (a) The character of Christ as revealed in the Gospels can furnish us only with principles, or ideals, of conduct. These principles have to be applied to the concrete situations of life. We need the inspiration and guidance of Christ's personality just as much in applying these principles as we do in discovering them. (b) The kind of study which we described in the last chapter as "devotional" study *is* prayer. When we search for the mind of Christ in the records, that is, when we study the life of Jesus with minds eager to understand him and with hearts eager to catch his spirit, we are praying in the very process of studying. For prayer, in the broadest and most comprehensive meaning of the term, is the act or habit of searching after the best that the universe holds for one.

There is, of course, another legitimate use of the word "prayer" which narrows its meaning to something very much more concrete and formal than this. In this more restricted meaning of the word, prayer is the

definite framing of one's thoughts, feelings, desires or decisions in the form of direct address to God. Yet it is not the fact that the mind is articulating itself in words that makes such an exercise prayer. It is the fact that one is actually expressing one's longing after God and his gifts. No formal "saying of prayers" without the spiritual desire for communion and self-expression Godward is prayer. On the other hand, the deep craving of the spirit of man for life's greatest good will shrink and die, just as any other natural instinct will shrink and die, if it is not given adequate opportunities to grow by self-expression.

There are many theories about prayer and its answer, and many denials that contact between the spirit of man and the Spirit of Christ is as real and immediate as prayer assumes it to be. But it is not necessary to have a finished theory about prayer before one prays. Whatever the true theory may be which explains the fact, it *is* a fact, verifiable in experience, that when one approaches the Christ of the Gospels with an earnest desire to know what this Christ would have him do, there is a reaction of conscience, a spiritual intuition, or whatever else one may call it, that throws light upon one's problem, and is not wholly one's own opinion or judg-

ment, but is in some measure the result of the influence of the personality of Jesus Christ himself.

Such attempts to discover the mind of Christ, however, must always be guarded against the danger of one's personal prejudice or caprice by reference to the best one knows concerning the historic personality of Christ. The spirit of prayer and the faithful study of the Gospels are the necessary correctives and complements of each other.

(3) In another very important sense the personality of Christ is present in his Church, and the Christian who seeks to hold his life steadily under the influence of Christ will therefore seek the companionship of Christian people in the worship and work of the Church. For the Church, in essence, is just the group life of those who are seeking to make Christ real to themselves and others.

It is this fact, that the Spirit of Christ is present in the collective life of Christian people as well as in each Christian's individual life, that Paul expresses figuratively when he calls the church the "body of Christ." As the physical body of Jesus was the residence of his spirit during the days of his flesh, so the Church is his dwelling-place in the larger life that he is living perpetually in the world.

One needs the objective portrait of Jesus in the Gospel records to correct and standardize the impulses to Christian duty that are born of the prayerful spirit. And in like manner, one needs the wholesome corrective of Christian counsel and friendship and partnership to keep one's ideas of truth and conduct from being narrowed or distorted by one's individual bias. Every one who desires to live under the constant inspiration and constraint of Jesus Christ should therefore seek to share in the life and work of some Christian church. No church will be found that embodies the Spirit of Christ perfectly; yet few will be found that do not embody it in some wholesome and helpful measure.

(4) Finally, it must never be forgotten that Christ's growing influence upon one's life is conditioned upon obedience. Not every one can claim that final promise which the risen Lord gave to his disciples, " Lo, I am with you always " (Matt. 28 : 20). For the promise was given in connection with a definite command. It is when we obey the command that we realize the Presence. This is true not only in the larger aspects of the great task of " making disciples of all the nations," but in all the details of the life which seeks to make its influence felt in the Christian enterprise. " He that willeth to do . . .

shall know" is not alone a great truth of modern pedagogy; it is an eternal law of the spiritual life. Obedience to each new demand that Christ makes upon one's life is the one way to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bosworth, *What It Means to be a Christian*, ch. IV.
King, *Things Fundamental*, ch. IV.
Dale, *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*, chs. I, II.
Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, pp. 50–62.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. The Christian life may be analyzed as (1) familiarity with the ideas and ideals of Jesus; (2) personal devotion to the personal leadership of Jesus; (3) the sense of forgiveness and spiritual renewal through the Spirit of Jesus; (4) active cooperation in furthering the cause of Jesus in the world. Which of these elements do you consider the central, or fundamental, element? How do you relate the others to it?

2. Is it possible to know God, in the Christian sense, without any aid from Christ? Is one always conscious of the part Christ plays in the knowledge of, and communion with, God?

3. Try to grasp firmly the idea that Christ is known and approached by the Christian in *two* ways: (1) through history, and (2) through religious experience ("faith"). Think out clearly just how these two

aspects of Christ (1) supplement and (2) correct each other.

4. Do you think that a confession of belief in the "divinity" of Christ ought to be made a condition of church membership? Why?

5. How do the two aspects of prayer (1) as the heart's search, or desire, for life's best things, and (2) as a definite, verbal exercise, supplement and correct each other? How can the principle involved in these two aspects of prayer be applied to the questions of (1) worship and church attendance; (2) the sacredness of life and the sacredness of the Lord's Day?

HOW TO STUDY THE GOSPELS

CHAPTER IX

How to Study the Gospels

1. **Importance of constant study of the Gospels.** The Gospels, as we saw in the last chapter, are one of the chief means of keeping the Christian in constant contact with the personality of Jesus Christ. Consequently the prayerful study of the Gospels, both privately and in fellowship with other Christians, is indispensable to the maintenance of a healthy Christian life. Every Christian should identify himself with some group of Christians, in a congregation or a Bible class, where the life of Christ forms the constant background, and often the actual subject, of the preaching or teaching. In one's personal reading and thinking, too, the Gospel memoirs of Jesus Christ should be the object of prayerful study for some considerable portion of each year. This chapter is intended to suggest the broad outlines and principles that may guide such a life-long study of the Gospels, whether in private or in Bible classes.

2. **Own your own Bible.** A borrowed book never gives quite the same satisfaction to the

student as one which he knows he can keep, and by means of which he can recall at any future time the outstanding impressions which he gained when he studied it. As one becomes more deeply involved in this sort of work, it will be found well worth while to own several Bibles, or New Testaments or copies of the Gospels, and to keep each copy for use in one particular kind of study.

The American Standard Version is the best all-round edition. The newer translations of the New Testament, like those of Weymouth or Moffatt or Goodspeed, are very valuable and well worth using. But they do not have the same weight of authority as translations that the American Standard Version has, and they are considerably more expensive. Hence they are not likely to come into general use for a long time at least. The American Standard Version, or the "Revised Version" (R. V.), as it is commonly called, has two important advantages over the older King James Version. It is a more accurate translation of the original; and it is printed in paragraphs, like a real book, instead of in separate verses. This latter feature is very important. It reflects the whole change from the old attitude toward the Bible, which regarded it chiefly as a collection of "texts," to be quoted with little or no reference to their

setting, and the modern attitude, which recognizes that the Bible is a collection of real literature, and is to be read and studied in the same way as any other book.

Be sure that your Bible is one of good print, large and clear enough to avoid all eye-strain. A fine-print Bible is just a standing invitation to neglect one's Bible study. Do not be afraid to mark your Bible. The wider the margin and heavier the paper the better for this purpose. The first time the writer ever read the Bible through he underscored the verse or two in each chapter which most appealed to him. His second connected reading was in the New Testament, and this time each paragraph (in the Revised Version) was given a topic, or title, in the margin. Other copies studied at later times contain underscorings, " railroadings " connecting related words or phrases, notes in black and red ink, references to sermons or chapters in the writer's library, outlines and analyses, and so on. Such a series of carefully marked Bibles becomes a literary treasure greatly to be prized in after years, as one reviews the various lines of study whose results have been thus preserved.

3. **Study each Gospel as a unit.** There is not a paragraph in the Gospels, not an incident or saying in the whole career of

Jesus, that will fail to reward the most patient and microscopic examination. Nor will any chance to compare a story in one Gospel with its parallel in another Gospel fail to yield fruitful suggestions if the literary relation of the Gospels to one another is rightly appreciated. But before either of these methods is undertaken in any thoroughgoing manner it is essential that each Gospel be known and appreciated as a separate literary unit. In spite of the fact that some of the Gospel writers copied portions of their materials from other Gospels, each one bears the stamp of distinct individuality; each has its own literary characteristics, each its own point of view for interpreting Christ, each its own separate contribution to make to one's total impression of the Jesus Christ of history.

The first and most fundamental kind of Gospel study, therefore, is the rapid reading and re-reading of each Gospel, without any attempt at the interpretation of details, and with resolute refusal to dwell upon more than the broadest points of comparison or contrast between one Gospel and another. Such reading should be repeated again and again, until each Gospel stands out in one's mind as a distinct literary production, having its own unity, characteristic literary traits, and message concerning Jesus Christ. It is only on

the foundation of this sort of mastery of the Gospels as literary wholes that one can proceed to the most successful study of detailed incidents, or to comparisons between parallel stories.

Mark, the shortest Gospel, can be read aloud in an hour and a half. Luke and Matthew can be read aloud in less than three hours. Most people read silently much faster than they read aloud, without losing the sense of what they are reading. The Gospels should be read in chronological order; Mark first, then Matthew and Luke, and finally, John. As far as possible such reading should cover one whole Gospel without stopping.

To conserve the values of such reading it is important that some written record be kept of the impressions gained by each reading. Such a record should not contain detailed interpretations, or arguments, or elaborate expositions, but real impressions only. To get the best results each reading should be begun with some well-defined question in mind, and the note-book at the close should record the answer which the reading has suggested to that question, and not much else except the date and extent of the reading. The following are examples of such questions: What are the main movements (geographical; use map) of Jesus according to this Gospel?

What are the general outlines of the development of his career? of his own sense of his mission? of his foresight of his death? of his hopes for his cause? of his successive temptations and surrenders to his Father's will? Which Gospel presents Jesus so as best to fit the ideas of (1) servant of the Lord; (2) Son of God; (3) King of Israel; (4) Son of man? What *new* impressions have I gained during this reading, of the character or greatness of Jesus? of the relative emphasis in this Gospel on his life *vs.* his death? of his miracles *vs.* his teaching? What are the main themes of his teaching? Trace the development, in their attitude and behavior toward Jesus, of the Pharisees; the crowds; the disciples.

4. **The study of separate sections or paragraphs.** The study of the details of each Gospel incident or discourse can produce the best results only when one has gained some clear impression of the point of view and message of each Gospel, by the use of some such method as has just been described. Only so can one approach the separate stories from the writer's own standpoint and gather from them the message which he meant to convey. The failure to provide for this broader and more comprehensive literary view of the books of the Bible is the weakest

point in most of the courses of Bible study now provided for church school use.

It is far better to take one Gospel at a time, beginning with Mark, and go through it paragraph by paragraph, omitting nothing, than to pick up a story here and another story there, skipping from one Gospel to another, and thus losing the particular flavor which each writer put into his own narrative, and which is often the real key to understanding the point of his story.

(1) **Analyze.** There are two ways of analyzing a Gospel. The first and simplest is to divide it into its simplest sections (almost always the paragraph as given in the Revised Version), and to select a title, or topic, for each, writing the list of topics, with references, in your note-book, or, better still, in the margin of a copy of the Gospels kept for this piece of study. Such an analysis amounts practically to a "table of contents." There is little or no attempt to show in it any particular scheme of development in the story or teaching of the Gospel. The other kind of analysis is the logical; in this form the outline is constructed so as to show as clearly as possible the development of some theme which each successive paragraph helps to unfold.

We may take the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5 to 7) as an illustration of these two

methods of analyzing. A topical outline would be something like this:

The Beatitudes (5 : 3–12)
Salt and Light (5 : 13–16)
True Righteousness (5 : 17–20)
Murder (5 : 21–26)
Adultery (5 : 27–32)
Oaths (5 : 33–37)
Revenge (5 : 38–42)
Loving One's Enemies (5 : 43–48)
Almsgiving (6 : 1–4)
Prayer (6 : 5–15)
Fasting (6 : 16–18)
Trust (6 : 19–34)
Judging Others (7 : 1–6)
Asking and Receiving (7 : 7–12)
The Two Ways (7 : 13–14)
False Prophets (7 : 15–23)
The Two Houses (7 : 24–27)

An analysis of the same chapters based on the logical principle would yield some such result as this:

Theme: The Kingdom of Heaven
I Its Nature: a kingdom of blessedness, founded on character (5 : 3–12)
II Its Object: to represent God in the world (5 : 13–16)
III Its Righteousness:
1 Founded on the law and prophets (5 : 17–20)

2 Perfect, as illustrated by five references to the Mosaic law (5 : 21–48)
3 Sincere, not hypocritical; with three illustrations (6 : 1–18)
4 The first duty of every member (6 : 19–34)

IV Its Rule: the "Golden Rule," which is to be applied to such matters as criticism and prayer (7 : 1–12)

V Its Conditions of Membership:
1 Very strict (7 : 13–14)
2 Based on doing the will of God (7 : 15–27)

(2) **Paraphrase.** One is usually surprised when he examines himself critically, to discover how easily familiar words and phrases are allowed to slip through the mind without understanding what they mean. There is only one way to make sure that one has really grasped the sense of a sentence or paragraph, and that is to make sure that one can re-tell it in other words. No superstitious reverence for the mere words of Scripture should blind the student to the great value of paraphrasing the language of the Gospels. One cannot be sure that he has mastered the idea until one is no longer dependent upon the exact words in which he found it.

With the constant aid of the dictionary, therefore, and also of a Greek-English lexicon

or concordance, if one is able to use it, the passages which are being studied should be written or spoken in other words, as nearly equivalent as possible to the original. It is of especial value to do this with the more obscure passages. For example, one may re-state Mark 4 : 11 in this way: "You are the sort of men to whom God can make clear the new and unfamiliar idea which I have come to teach regarding God's government of human life." Or Mark 3 : 29 might be paraphrased in some such language as this: "As for those whose conscience is so dead that they can no longer discriminate between a filthy spirit (Beelzebub) and God's pure Spirit, there is grave danger that they will never seek forgiveness, but will cling to their wickedness forever." It is not to be supposed that such paraphrases are exactly equivalent to the text itself; if they were they would be translations, not paraphrases. But they are attempts to lay hold of and express the idea which the Gospel writer is trying to set forth. Such exercises give the student real proof that he is in search of living truth and not of dead formulas.

(3) **Consult books.** It is always better to try to express the sense of a passage in one's own words before seeking to find out what others have said about it. The attempt may

have to be revised in the light of what you read, but it proves the independence of your thought, and without this the study of the Gospels will amount to little. But having put your mind conscientiously to work on the passage, the next thing is to find out what others have said about it.

A good Bible Dictionary, like Hastings' one-volume dictionary, is the first requisite. By means of it one should seek constantly to become acquainted with the localities and customs that are referred to in the Gospel story. Scribes, synagogue, Nazareth, Pilate, temple, — all such words of local or technical import should be looked up as one comes to them. In addition to the Bible Dictionary, the following books, selected from the immense literature of the subject, will be found especially helpful:

The volumes on the Gospels in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Handy commentaries, which explain the Gospels verse by verse.

Burton, *A Short Introduction to the Gospels.* A valuable handbook for tracing out the literary peculiarities of each Gospel, so far as these bear upon the questions of authorship.

Goodspeed, *The Story of the New Testament.*
Bacon, *The Making of the New Testament.*
Scott, *The New Testament Today.*
Von Soden, *History of New Testament Literature.*

The sections on the Gospels present the views of some of the foremost modern scholars regarding the origin of these four books of the New Testament.

Moffatt, *Introduction to the New Testament.*
Moffatt, *The Approach to the New Testament.*
Garvie, *The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved* (Studies in the Fourth Gospel).

In these volumes advanced students will find the ripest results of the most devout and careful scholarship of today.

Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.* (2 vols.)

An old book, but still of great value for its information regarding the Jewish customs and beliefs that form the background of the life of Christ.

Smith, *The Days of His Flesh.*
Garvie, *Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus.*
Glover, *The Jesus of History.*
Kent, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus.*

Four fresh and stimulating guides to the study of the life of Christ.

Hutton, *The Proposal of Jesus.*
Simkhovitch, *Toward the Understanding of Jesus.*

Two attempts to trace the relation of Jesus and his message to the political conditions and problems of his time.

Bergner, *Some Aspects of the Life of Jesus.*

An interpretation of Jesus in the light of recent researches in psychology.

Jefferson, *The Character of Jesus.*
Jefferson, *Things Fundamental.*
King, *Fundamental Questions.*
Bosworth, *What It Means to be a Christian.*
Winchester, *The Message of the Master Teacher.*
Simpson, *The Fact of Christ.*
Dale, *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels.*

Certain chapters in these books are given in the "References for Further Reading." In each case, the whole volume will well repay careful study.

(4) **Summarize.** The results of paragraph study should be gathered together in a notebook, or in some form of Bible marking, which will serve to recall the chief discoveries whenever desired. These notes should include (1) a short statement of the main teaching of the passage, i.e., what the writer

intended his readers to learn from it; (2) paraphrases or explanations of the less obvious passages; (3) quotations or notes from books consulted; (4) questions or memoranda for further study.

5. **Compare the Gospels with one another.** It is always better to allow a Gospel story to make its own independent impression first, before bringing it into comparison with parallel sections in the other Gospels. After this has been done, however, comparisons may be made, and such comparisons will nearly always yield further suggestions of value, if rightly done.

A "synopsis," or edition of the Gospels which prints the parallel passages in columns beside each other, is indispensable in this comparative study. A good synopsis is that edited by Ross L. Finney, which is based on the German work of A. Huck. The first three Gospels are printed in parallel columns, in the American Standard Version, and one can see at a glance the differences or similarities in the corresponding accounts of the same incident or discourse.

In this kind of study one must guard against the tendency to harmonize all the differing and contradictory statements which appear when comparisons are made. It is not easy to resist the desire to make a state-

ment in Matthew mean something that will bring it into agreement with the corresponding statement in Mark, rather than to let it mean just what Matthew meant by it, whether it agrees with Mark or not. When Matthew, for example, reports Jesus as saying, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (7 : 11), and Luke, in the corresponding verse (Luke 11 : 13) changes the words "good gifts" in the last part to "Holy Spirit," no attempt to "harmonize" the difference can be half as satisfactory as to recognize that Luke has made a change in the statement that he had read in Matthew's *Logia*, because he cared more about calling attention to Jesus' great gift of the Holy Spirit than he did about minute accuracy of quotation.

In general, it is well to begin this comparative study by noting what Mark has to say; when Mark's viewpoint and teaching have been appreciated one may then turn to Matthew and Luke, and see what additional details are furnished, or what different point of view or personal interest is represented by the changes which they have made in their versions of the same story.

6. **Study the Gospel characters.** If one

has a good working knowledge of the contents and main teachings of the Gospels, there is no more fruitful study for the culture of the Christian life than to trace out the history of the various characters who came into contact with Jesus Christ during his earthly career. It is safe to say that in the characters of Simon Peter, Mary and Martha, Nicodemus, Herod, Pilate, Thomas, Judas, and all the rest, every type of human life is represented and every shade and variety of goodness and badness. And the peculiar value of these characters is that we can see them in contact with the character of Christ, so that Christ's reaction to such people, and their reaction to Christ, can be traced out. Thus the study of the Gospel characters furnishes an inexhaustible field for the discovery of Christ's attitude toward all sorts of men and all kinds of human problems.

The following plan, modified occasionally as circumstances require, may be followed in such a study. (1) Select the particular character to be studied, and make a list of all the passages in which this character figures significantly. (2) Study each passage carefully and gather together in your notebook a list of the outstanding traits of this character as revealed in the words or actions recorded. It is well to sum up these data in

the form of a short character-sketch, using the Gospel incidents as illustrations. (3) Review the passages again, noting in each case the personal attitude or behavior toward Christ; appeal for help, indifference, enmity, curious inquiry, admiration, confession of faith, etc. (4) Then, going over the passages once more, observe how Jesus responded to each situation as it arose; with sympathy, rebuke, denunciation, appeal, instruction, etc. (5) Finally, think out the permanent values of the incidents which have been studied; that is, work out in the form of a simple and clear statement how Jesus Christ feels and responds to such and such a type of character or such and such a situation or problem. The Christian faith in Christ is that he is "the same, yesterday, today and forever." His reaction to the men of his own time is a revelation of the perpetual reaction of God to men of similar character or condition, and therein lie the spiritual values of this sort of study.

A single example may be given to illustrate this method. Take the story of Thomas the apostle. There are only three passages in which we find him (except in formal lists of the apostles). These are all in John's Gospel (chaps. 11, 14 and 20). In the first we see him expressing his ardent devotion to

Christ, as he declared he would rather go up to Jerusalem and die with Christ than remain in safety without his Master. In the second we see him interrupting Christ, to ask for further light on a point that was not clear to him. In the third we find him declaring that he will not believe on the risen Christ until he has the same evidence for his faith which the other apostles had already received; but when that evidence is forthcoming, he readily makes his confession. Thus the character of Thomas appears vividly in these passages; he is a man of splendid loyalty, of devoted friendship, to Christ; and a man, also, of fine intellectual honesty, ready to confess his faith when he has reasons for his belief, but scorning to confess as his own a faith which he must take merely on the authority of some one else. As we study Jesus' response to him we mark, first, how he allowed Thomas to go up to Jerusalem with him, letting the course of events vindicate his own good judgment in going into danger; we see also how patiently he explained Thomas' difficulty to him; and we see, finally, how promptly and graciously he gave his apostle the experience of sight and touch as a foundation for the faith he sought in him. All this reveals the patient dealing of God with men of Thomas' characteristics.

7. **The study of the life of Christ.** If one is sufficiently grounded in the independent study of the Gospels so that he will not be led to abandon his own individual thinking and judgment, he will find great inspiration in reading at least one good life of Christ each year. Such reading should always be done both critically and sympathetically. The student should never surrender his right to differ from an author in his interpretation of this or that point concerning the life of Jesus. The reading of a book on the life of Christ should be done with the Gospels and notebook in hand, so that new items of information, or new ideas suggested from the author's treatment of familiar passages, can be verified or else rejected. The critical attitude, however, should not exclude a real appreciation of the special point of view from which the book under consideration treats the life or significance of Christ. There are few if any biographies of Jesus that have not some new and inspiring message for those who read with care to understand the writer's aims and viewpoint.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

JEFFERSON, *Things Fundamental*, chs. IV and V ("How the Old Conception of the Scriptures Differs from the New")
SMYTH, *How We Got Our Bible.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Why was the King James version printed so as to make each verse stand out by itself, as though it were a complete paragraph?

2. As an exercise in *analyzing*, study Mark 2 : 1 to 3 : 6. Make a topical outline. How many incidents are there? Give each one an appropriate title. Select a title for the whole section. Now make a logical outline of the same section, around the idea of "the beginning, growth and climax of opposition to Jesus." Study each incident carefully until you understand (paraphrase) each successive criticism against Jesus, his reaction in each case, and how one criticism led to another, culminating in 3: 6.

GENERAL REVIEW

1. In what sense are the Gospels of human origin? of Divine origin?

2. Name the Gospels in the order in which they were written; describe briefly the characteristics of each, and how each was written. What is the particular emphasis of each Gospel on the character, or mission, of Christ? on the nature of Christianity?

3. Why is constant study of the Gospels necessary to Christian growth? Always remember that the penalties of neglect in this matter are not *immediately* apparent; one can get along for a while on the momen-

tum of the past; but they are *sure;* and the worst effects are bound to show in *our children.*

4. Consider thoughtfully that one of the most important tasks of the Church is to bring people persistently into contact with the personality of Jesus Christ. What ways can you name in which the Church can and should do this? Are there any other tasks in the Church that are greater and more important than this? Give your reasons for your answer.

5. Which Gospel do you like best? Why?

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